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Food and Survival in Asia



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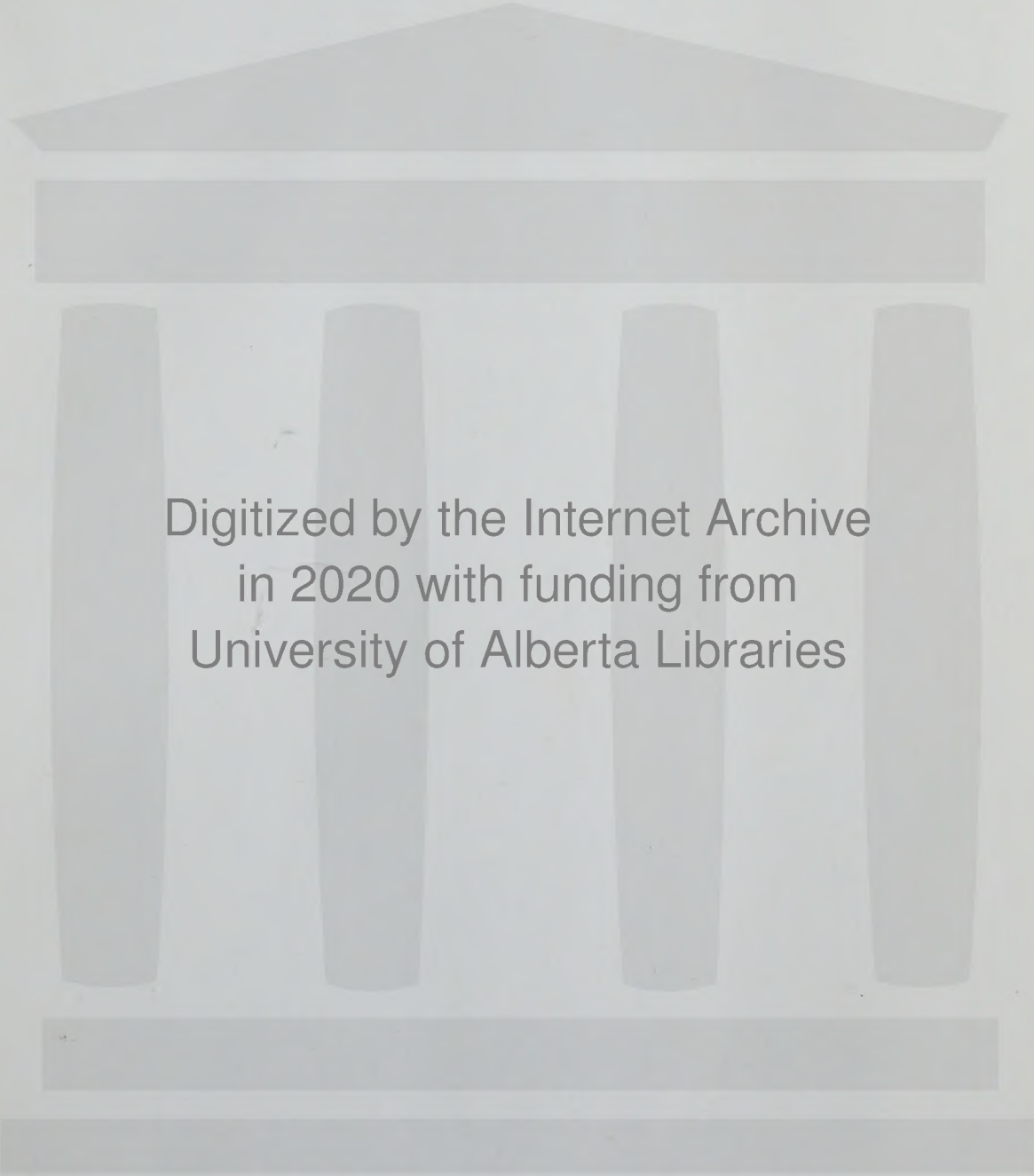
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Food and Survival in Asia

Social Studies Inquiry Program

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ASIAN STUDIES INQUIRY PROGRAM

Food and Survival in Asia

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Introduction

Japan, which fails to grow enough food to satisfy the needs of its people, manages not only to import sufficient food products, but also to attack health problems, provide jobs, and steadily raise its standard of living. Its ability to deal effectively with the traditional problems of supplying ample food and material goods for its people may be attributed to efficient farming methods as well as to a highly developed industrial complex. China, however, with its limited industrial production, the world's largest population, and only ten percent of its land well suited for the production of food, manages with difficulty to meet the historic threats of hunger and poverty. India, with less industrial production than China, and with the prospects of doubling its population in thirty-five years, has experienced great difficulties in dealing successfully with the hunger, poverty, and unemployment of its people during the last few years.

Such a report on the three major Asian countries' present ability to meet the immediate needs of their people has serious implications. While much of Asia still relies on muscle rather than on machines, and still needs 80 percent of its people to feed the remaining 20 percent, its population is increasing at a greater rate than its production of food, and the expectations of its people are steadily rising. To meet the present-day needs for more food and better living conditions, Asian countries are experimenting with new and radical

political and economic systems such as Communism in China and Democracy in India and Japan. The economic, social, and political consequences of Asia's struggle against hunger and poverty have led to the involvement and concern of the rest of the world with Asia.

The human issues of hunger and poverty raise a variety of questions around which *Food and Survival* has been organized. The first section, entitled *The Impact of Hunger and Poverty in Asia*, raises two major questions: How extensive and serious are the problems of food shortages and poverty? What are the actual effects of hunger and poverty? The second section, entitled *The Causes of Hunger and Poverty*, also raises two important questions: What are the causes of hunger and poverty? What can be done to eliminate hunger and poverty? Together these two sections should provide the information necessary for a productive inquiry into major issues of contemporary Asia. While there are no "right answers" to the major questions concerning poverty and hunger in Asia, your inquiry will help you gain valuable insights into one of the most important problems of the twentieth century.

The Impact of Hunger and Poverty in Asia



Reading one

Famines

Famine conditions represent poverty in its most destructive form. For thousands of years the people of Asia lived in fear of severe shortages and famines. A famine would often spread like a dreaded plague, sweeping from one end of the land to another, disappearing for a time, but inevitably returning to inflict more human suffering. Such famines do not occur as frequently today, but their threat is ever present. The following reading is composed of three excerpts depicting famine conditions and their effects.

Famine in China—1876[†]

Between 1876 and 1879 a famine struck the ten northern provinces of China, killing from 15 to 20 million people. Timothy Richard, a Baptist missionary, recorded the following observations of conditions in Shansi province during 1876.

As the winter drew near, the distress became more acute. Reports came in from villages where previously there had been forty inhabitants reduced to ten survivors. The price of grain rose rapidly to three and four times its usual rate. Many people, hearing that grain was cheap in Manchuria, migrated across the Gulf of Pechihli. Those who could not afford to travel were forced to pull down their houses and sell every inch of woodwork in them, whether

doors, windows, frames, or rafters, as firewood, and so get money to buy millet chaff to try and keep body and soul together.

In order to keep warm in the depth of winter the poor wretches dug deep pits underground, where twenty, thirty, and even fifty persons would live together. Here the vitiated atmosphere, as well as the lack of food, caused a large number of deaths. At first the survivors could not afford to dig a separate grave for each, so they made two large holes, one for men, the other for women, into which the dead were thrown. Afterwards the dead were left where they fell, sometimes in their homes, sometimes in the villages, sometimes on the roads, there they were devoured by wild dogs, wolves, and vultures. . . .

[†] Roger Pélissier, *The Awakening of China 1793-1949* (London: Secker & Warburg, Ltd., 1967).

January 28th, 1878. Started on a journey south through the centre of the province to discover the severity of the famine. I rode on a mule, and had a servant with me, also on a mule. Before leaving the city we could not go straight to the south gate, as there was a man lying in the street about to die of starvation, and a crowd had gathered round.

January 29th. Passed four dead men on the road and another moving on his hands and knees, having no strength to stand up. Met a funeral, consisting of a mother carrying on her shoulder a dead boy ten years old. She was the only bearer, priest, and mourner, and she laid him in the snow outside the city wall. . . .

January 30th. Saw fourteen dead on the roadside. One had only a stocking on. His corpse was being dragged by a dog, so light it was. Two of the dead were women. They had had a burial, but it had consisted only in turning the faces to the ground. The passers-by had dealt more kindly with one, for they had left her her clothes. A third corpse was a feast to a score of screaming crows and magpies. There were fat pheasants, rabbits, foxes, and wolves, but men and women had no means of living. One old man beside whom I slowly climbed a hill said most pathetically: "Our mules and donkeys are all eaten up. Our labourers are dead. What crime have we committed, that God should punish us thus?"

February 1st. Saw six dead bodies in half a day, and four of them were women: one in an open shed, naked but for a string around her waist; another in a

stream; one in the water, half exposed above the ice at the mercy of wild dogs; another half clad in rags in one of the open caves at the roadside; another half eaten, torn by birds and beasts of prey. Met two youths of about eighteen years of age, tottering on their feet, and leaning on sticks as if ninety years of age. Met another young man carrying his mother on his shoulders, as her strength had failed. Seeing me looking at them closely, the young man begged for help. This is the only one who has begged since I left T'ai-yuan fu.

Saw some men grinding soft stones, somewhat like those from which stone pencils are made, into powder which was . . . to be mixed with any grain, or grass seed, or roots and made into cakes. I tried some of these cakes, and they tasted like what most of them were—clay. Many died of constipation in consequence of eating them. . . .

February 2nd. At the next city was the most awful sight I ever saw. It was early in the morning when I approached the city gate. On one side of it was a pile of naked dead men, heaped on top of each other as though they were pigs in a slaughterhouse. On the other side of the gate was a similar heap of dead women, their clothing having been taken away to pawn for food. Carts were there to take the corpses away to two great pits, into one of which they threw the men, and into the other the women. . . . For many miles in this district the trees were all white, stripped clean for ten or twenty feet high of their bark, which was being used for food. We passed many houses without doors and window frames, which had been sold as firewood. Inside were kitchen utensils left untouched only

because they could not be turned into money. The owners had gone away and died.

February 3rd. Saw only seven persons today, but no woman among them. This was explained by meeting carts daily full of women being taken away for sale. There were travellers on foot also, all carrying weapons of defence, even children in their teens, some with spears, some with bright, gleaming swords, others with rusty knives, proofs of their terrible plight. We did not feel very safe in their midst. . . .

February 4th. Having gone so far, and seeing such terrible sights, I decided to return to T'ai-yuan fu, as I had sufficient proofs of the horrors of famine to move even hearts of stone.

Even the wolves were becoming fearless. Seeing a wolf by the roadside one day, I yelled at him, expecting him to flee in terror. On the contrary, he stood and stared at me, as if wondering at my boldness in facing him.

Returning along the same road, we had a daily repetition of the same ghastly sights, until I sometimes wondered whether the scenes were not the imagination of a disordered mind.

Famine in China—1943[†]

The events described by Timothy Richard in 1876 were nearly repeated in 1943, according to the observations of two American writers.

The smaller villages were even worse than the market towns. The silence was fright-

ening. People fled the impersonal cruelty of hunger as if a barbarian army were upon them. The villages echoed with emptiness; streets were deserted, compost piles untended waiting for spring, doors and windows boarded up. The abandoned houses amplified the slightest sound. A baby crying in a hidden room in a village sounded louder than the pounding of our horses' hooves. Two lone women quarreled in a haunted street, and their shrieking rang louder than the hurly-burly of a village fair.

There were corpses on the road. A girl no more than seventeen, slim and pretty, lay on the damp earth, her lips blue with death; her eyes were open, and the rain fell on them. People chipped at bark, pounded it by the roadside for food; vendors sold leaves at a dollar a bundle. A dog digging at a mound was exposing a human body. Ghostlike men were skimming the stagnant pools to eat the green slime of the waters. We whipped our horses to the quickest possible pace in the effort to make Chengchow by evening of the third day. As dusk closed, snow began to fall, light and powdery. Once our horses stumbled in a field and sheered off violently from two people lying side by side in the night, sobbing aloud in their desolation. By the time we entered the city, the snow was heavy enough to muffle the thudding of our horses' hooves.

When we awoke in the morning, the city was a white sepulcher peopled with gray ghosts. Death ruled Chengchow, for the famine centered there. We stood at the head of the main street, looked down the deserted way for all its length—and saw nothing. Occasionally someone in flutter-

[†] Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby, *Thunder Out of China* (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1946).

ing, wind-blown rags would totter out of a doorway. Those who noticed us clustered round; spreading their hands in supplication, they cried "*K'o lien, k'o lien*," [mercy, mercy] till our ears rang with it.

The quick and the dead confused us. Down a side street a man trundled a wheelbarrow with a figure lying passively across it. The inert form was dressed in blue rags, the naked feet covered with goose-pimples; it stirred and quivered and seemed alive, but the bobbing of the head only reflected the roughness of the road. Other people were lying in the gutters; we shook one or two to make sure they were dead, and when one man moved slightly, we thrust a large bill into his hand. His numb fingers closed about the money, but it was only a reflex action; they unbent slowly, and the bill trembled in his open palm. Another moaned as he lay, and we shook him to try to make him get up. Then we turned to a woman in rags who was clutching a baby; we begged her to help us move the man to the refugee compound, and we gave her a bill to strengthen our plea. As she bent, the baby fell from her arms into the snow and cried pitifully. We saw them off, all three, toward the compound, and the Catholic father who was escorting us said, "At least let them die like human beings."

We heard the story of the people from the Protestant missionaries and the Catholic fathers who jointly controlled American relief moneys. The strong had fled earlier; all who were left now were the old, the weak, and the few hardy characters who were staying to guard the spring wheat that would soon be in full growth. The people were slicing bark from elm trees, grinding it to eat as food. Some were

tearing up the roots of the new wheat; in other villages people were living on pounded peanut husks or refuse. Refugees on the road had been seen madly cramming soil into their mouths to fill their bellies, and the missionary hospitals were stuffed with people suffering from terrible intestinal obstructions due to the filth they were eating.

Letters of the Protestant missionaries recorded the early stages of the crisis, when the trek started in the fall. Mobs of hungry peasants, their women and children with them, had forced their way into wealthy homes and stripped them of anything that could be carried off. They had rushed into irrigated grain fields to seize the standing crops. In some cases hunger had burned out the most basic human emotions; two maddened parents had tied six children to trees so they could not follow them as they left in search of food. When a group of mother, baby, and two older children became tired from the long hunt for food, the mother, sitting down to nurse the infant sent the older children on to look for food at the next village; when they returned, the baby was still sucking at the breast of the dead mother. In a fit of frenzy the parents of two little children had murdered them rather than hear them beg for something to eat. Some families sold all they had for one last big meal, then committed suicide.

By spring, when we arrived, the more vigorous, disturbing elements had fled to the west, where there was food. Those who remained were wasting in hopelessness with a minimum of violence. The missionaries now reported something worse—cannibalism. A doctor told us of a woman

caught boiling her baby; she was not molested, because she insisted that the child had died before she started to cook it. Another woman had been caught cutting off the legs of her dead husband for meat; this, too, was justified on the ground that the man was already dead. In the mountain districts there were uglier tales of refugees caught on lonely roads and killed for their flesh. How much of this was just gruesome legend and how much truth we could not judge. But we heard the same tales too frequently, in too widely scattered places, to ignore the fact that in Honan human beings were eating their own kind.

Famine in the Life of One Chinese[†]

Famine conditions such as these just described are often viewed as tragic events affecting large numbers of faceless people. Pearl Buck has attempted, through a fictional description, to portray the impact of famine conditions on a particular family in traditional China.

Wang Lung, sitting at the threshold of his door, said to himself that now surely something must be done. They could not remain here in this empty house and die. In his lean body, about which he daily wrapped more tightly his loose girdle, there was a determination to live. He would not thus, just when he was coming into the fullness of a man's life, suddenly be robbed of it by a stupid fate. There was such anger in him now as he often could not express. At times it seized him like a frenzy so that he rushed out upon his barren threshing floor and shook his arms at the foolish sky

that shone above him, eternally blue and clear and cold and cloudless.

"Oh, you are too wicked, you Old Man in Heaven!" he would cry recklessly. And if for an instant he were afraid, he would the next instant cry sullenly, "And what can happen to me worse than that which has happened!"

Once he walked, dragging one foot after another in his famished weakness, to the temple of the earth, and deliberately he spat upon the face of the small, imperturbable god who sat there with his goddess. There were no sticks of incense now before this pair, nor had there been for many moons, and their paper clothes were tattered and showed their clay bodies through the rents. But they sat there unmoved by anything and Wang Lung gnashed his teeth at them and walked back to his house groaning and fell upon his bed.

They scarcely rose at all now, any of them. There was no need, and fitful sleep took the place, for a while, at least, of the food they had not. The cobs of the corn they had dried and eaten and they stripped the bark from trees and all over the countryside people were eating what grass they could find upon the wintry hills. There was not an animal anywhere. A man might walk for a handful of days and see not an ox nor an ass nor any kind of beast or fowl.

The children's bellies were swollen out with empty wind, and one never saw in these days a child playing upon the village street. At most the two boys in Wang Lung's house crept to the door and sat in the sun, the cruel sun that never ceased its endless shining. Their once rounded bodies were angular and bony now, sharp

[†] Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth* (New York: The John Day Company, Inc., 1931).

small bones like the bones of birds, except for their ponderous bellies. The girl child never even sat alone, although the time was past for this, but lay uncomplaining hour after hour wrapped in an old quilt. At first the angry insistence of her crying had filled the house, but she had come to be quiet, sucking feebly at whatever was put into her mouth and never lifting up her voice. Her little hollowed face peered out at them all, little sunken blue lips like a toothless old woman's lips, and hollow black eyes peering.

This persistence of the small life in some way won her father's affection, although if she had been round and merry as the others had been at her age he would have been careless of her for a girl. Sometimes, looking at her he whispered softly,

"Poor fool—poor little fool—" And once when she essayed a weak smile with her toothless gums showing, he broke into tears and took into his lean hard hand her small claw and held the tiny grasp of her fingers over his forefinger. Thereafter he would sometimes lift her, all naked as she lay, and thrust her inside the scant warmth of his coat against his flesh and sit with her so by the threshold of the house, looking out over the dry, flat fields.

As for the old man, he fared better than any, for if there was anything to eat he was given it, even though the children were without. Wang Lung said to himself proudly that none should say in the hour of death he had forgotten his father. Even if his own flesh went to feed him the old man should eat. The old man slept day and night, and ate what was given him and there was still strength in him to creep about the dooryard at noon when the sun was warm. He was more cheerful than any

of them and he quavered forth one day in his old voice that was like a little wind trembling among cracked bamboos.

"There have been worse days—there have been worse days. Once I saw men and women eating children."

"There will never be such a thing in my house," said Wang Lung, in extremest horror.

There was a day when his neighbor Ching, worn now to less than the shadow of a human creature, came to the door of Wang Lung's house and he whispered from his lips that were dried and black as earth.

"In town the dogs are eaten and everywhere the horses and the fowls of every sort. Here we have eaten the beasts that ploughed our fields and the grass and the bark of trees. What now remains for food?"

Wang Lung shook his head hopelessly. In his bosom lay the slight, skeleton-like body of his girl child, and he looked down into the delicate bony face, and into the sharp, sad eyes that watched him unceasingly from his breast. When he caught those eyes in his glance, invariably there wavered upon the child's face a flickering smile that broke his heart.

Ching thrust his face nearer.

"In the village they are eating human flesh," he whispered. "It is said your uncle and his wife are eating. How else are they living and with strength enough to walk about—they, who, it is known, have never had anything?"

Wang Lung drew back from the death-like head which Ching had thrust forward as he spoke. With the man's eyes close like this, he was horrible. Wang Lung was suddenly afraid with a fear he did not understand. He rose quickly as though to cast off some entangling danger.

"We will leave this place," he said loudly. "We will go south! There are everywhere in this great land people who starve. Heaven, however wicked, will not at once wipe out the sons of Han."

His neighbor looked at him patiently. "Ah, you are young," he said sadly. "I am older than you and my wife is old and we have nothing except one daughter. We can die well enough."

"You are more fortunate than I," said Wang Lung. "I have my old father and these three small mouths and another about to be born. We must go lest we forget our nature and eat each other as the wild dogs do."

And then it seemed to him suddenly that what he said was very right, and he called aloud to O-lan, who lay upon the bed day after day without speech, now that there was no food for the stove and no fuel for the oven.

"Come, woman, we will go south!"

There was cheer in his voice such as none had heard in many moons, and the children looked up and the old man hobbled out from his room and O-lan rose feebly from her bed and came to the door of their room and clinging to the door frame she said,

"It is a good thing to do. One can at least die walking."

The child in her body hung from her lean loins like a knotty fruit and from her face every particle of flesh was gone, so that the jagged bones stood forth rock-like under her skin. "Only wait until tomorrow," she said. "I shall have given birth by then. I can tell by this thing's movements in me."

"Tomorrow, then," answered Wang Lung, and then he saw his wife's face and

he was moved with a pity greater than any he had had for himself. This poor creature was dragging forth yet another!

"How shall you walk, you poor creature!" he muttered, and he said unwillingly to his neighbor Ching, who still leaned against the house by the door, "If you have any food left, for a good heart's sake give me a handful to save the life of the mother of my sons."

Ching answered humbly,

"Before this cruel heaven I promise you that I have only a little handful of dried red beans buried beneath the stone of my doorway. This I and my wife placed there for our last hour, for our child and ourselves, that we might die with a little food in our stomachs. But some of it I will give to you, and tomorrow go south, if you can. I stay, I and my house. I am older than you and I have no son, and it does not matter whether I live or die."

And he went away and in a little while he came back, bringing tied in a cotton kerchief a double handful of small red beans, mouldy with the soil. The children clambered about at the sight of the food, and even the old man's eyes glistened, but Wang Lung pushed them away for once and he took the food in to his wife as she lay and she ate a little of it, bean by bean, unwilling except that her hour was upon her and she knew that if she had not any food she would die in the clutches of her pain.

Only a few of the beans did Wang Lung hide in his own hand and these he put into his own mouth and he chewed them into a soft pulp and then putting his lips to the lips of his daughter he pushed into her mouth the food, and watching her small lips move, he felt himself fed.

The Indian Village

While the possible threat of famine conditions may haunt many Indians or Chinese, the major concern of most Asians is to raise living standards above a minimal subsistence level. The vast majority of Asians is not threatened by famines, but each day this majority faces conditions which most Westerners would term “impoverished.” The Indian village and its standard of living is an important focal point, for 80 percent of India’s population live in the more than 500,000 villages. The following reading which describes a typical Indian village may encourage the reader to reflect on the definition of “poverty” and to consider the impact of the described living conditions.

Even flying over the Indian countryside after dusk, one can sense the poverty of the village masses. Virtually no lights are to be seen for mile after mile except where the rare city or market town passes below. In the many tiny villages dotted between these, millions of people who have just finished their day’s work spend their evening in darkness. Increasing numbers of villagers now own kerosene lanterns with chimneys, in place of the tiny chimneyless homemade lamps of the past. But they use lanterns sparingly because they can afford little kerosene. In a very few rural areas, electricity is available and may be used to pump water for irrigation, but electric lines seldom run into the villages themselves.¹ The use of electricity for

domestic purposes in the villages is still a distant target. Indeed, even in cities, only a fraction of the population can afford to take advantage of electric services.

Another illustration of the low standard of living is the lack of medical care, available only rarely in the villages. Most of India’s 81,000 Western-trained doctors—many of them up to the highest Western standards—practice in the large cities.

A governmental primary health unit consists typically of a nurse and a medical practitioner who may not be a fully trained doctor. It may have a one- or two-room hospital or clinic, and a medical van that tours the adjacent countryside, stopping briefly at certain villages. At each stop, villagers come forward with their ailments, are given quick diagnoses, and perhaps

1. Only six percent of the villages had access to electricity in 1963.

[†] Beatrice Lamb, *India: A World in Transition* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1966).

some medicine from one of the several big bottles which the medical van carries. Each such unit is expected to serve an entire Development Block (an average of 66,000 persons in a zone of 150 to 170 square miles). Time, staff, and facilities are not adequate to treat more than a fraction of those needing treatment, or to do, even for those few, more than a fraction of what a well-staffed, well-equipped modern hospital could do. The vast majority of mortal illnesses in the countryside go undiagnosed. The chief single cause of death in India is listed simply as "fevers"—with no breakdown as to the type of fever in question or the cause thereof. For such routine matters as childbirth, village women still use local midwives—many of whom are untouchables, because contact with childbirth is regarded as polluting.

However low the average per capita income of the Indian population may be (it was estimated at about \$69 per person in 1961, a sum that might be equivalent in purchasing power to \$300 in the United States), the income of the villagers is certainly still lower. (At best, rural-income figures are only estimates, since much of the income in the rural areas still consists of what the peasants raise for their own consumption or acquire by barter without reference to the market or prices.)

Indian economists believe that the food the villagers eat constitutes 66 per cent of their total income. Even so, close to a third of the villagers are normally undernourished, especially in regard to protective foods containing vitamins, minerals, and proteins. Perhaps 10 per cent of the average income goes for clothing—meaning, in practice, about two lengths of cheap cotton cloth each year to wind around the body

as saris for the women or as dhotis, lungis, or loincloths for the men. Another 5–7 per cent is spent on traditional ceremonies, especially on the expensive hospitality required by social custom whenever a wedding occurs. Only about a fifth of the earnings remains for all the other necessities of life, including housing, kerosene, and payments to the moneylender or credit cooperatives, to whom the peasant is chronically in debt. Although the use of shoes is increasing, many go barefoot.

The possessions of a village household tend to be limited to a few bare essentials: copper and earthenware pots for cooking, carrying water, and storing grain; a few cotton quilts or other bedding; a small tin box in which to keep the few clothes or other valuables; some religious pictures or figures of the gods; and one or more of the inevitable charpoys (cots of woven string), which are used not only as beds but also as tables on which grain may be dried in the sun, as well as for many other purposes.

Today, a few men in each village may own a bicycle—a new luxury to be used by adult males only. The increased number of bicycles is one of the more visible reflections of the increased per capita income in the last ten years. It is estimated that some 4 million bicycles are now in use in India, as against only 304,000 private cars. The chief means of transportation in the countryside, however, remains the two-wheeled carts (there are 9.5 million of them) pulled by slow-moving pairs of bullocks.

In different regions, the villages are laid out differently and use different building materials. In the south, houses are usually set apart from one another, with coconut

palms or other fruit trees between. The walls, as well as the thatched roofs, are often made of vegetable fibers. In the north, the traditional fear of invasion led to the clustering of the houses of each village in a compact group forming almost a solid mass. Most of the houses are unsubstantial mud huts, easily eroded in the rains. In both the north and the south, a village may also contain a few pukka² brick buildings, homes of the wealthier peasants, plus perhaps a new two-room schoolhouse serving also as a community center, library, and temporary clinic on the rare days when a medical van passes by. But most village homes have only one room, or two at most. The cattle are often brought indoors at night to protect them from robbers. Most homes are dark, and often have no windows at all; this lack is sometimes attributed to the fear of robbery—a window would mean one more aperture to lock (and the heavy iron locks required for the doors cost more than enough by themselves). The floors are of mud, carefully swept and coated with a thin paste made of cow dung and water, which when dry leaves a cement-like surface. Most of the homes contain literally nothing but the few essentials already mentioned. The home of the village headman frequently contains one object not found in the other homes, and normally tucked away in the rafters above—a battered wooden chair to be brought down and dusted off whenever a government agent, official, or other distinguished visitor comes to the village.

Close to the village is a pond, or “tank” of stagnant water, from which the cattle drink and in which the washing is done. The fields and pasturelands lie outside the

village, not within it. They form a patchwork quilt of small irregular plots separated from one another by low earth banks (bunds). Around the edge of the village, cow-dung cakes are usually stacked in piles as reserves of household fuel against the rainy season, when dung will not dry. There may be a few trees for shade or fruit, but none for fuel. In most parts of India, wood is too valuable to be burned.

The typical village has neither a post office nor a shop, though the village moneylender may keep in his home a small stock of cloth, matches, kerosene, salt, combs, soap, flashlights, and other small articles for sale. The villagers buy and sell mostly at a market town, if there is one nearby, or at some spot on a roadside toward which the bullock carts of a number of villages converge once a week, thereby creating a market center.

Although a few richer families may have wells of their own, especially where the water level is near the surface, village life usually centers around one or two common wells, from which the women carry home the water for cooking, drinking, and washing in large jars on their heads.

In north India especially, all except the poorest village homes have a tiny courtyard in which much of the family living takes place. In a corner of the courtyard, a pair of bricks or stones or two little ridges of dried mud support between them a cooking pot under which the fire of cow-dung cakes is built. Chimneys are still rare. The more self-respecting village homes may keep another corner of the courtyard reserved for washing purposes, but latrines are still virtually nonexistent.

2. An Indian word meaning “solid.”

The Chinese Agricultural Communes

Four out of five Chinese live in rural areas. The traditional Chinese village, by Western standards, represented extreme poverty conditions. However, in 1958, with its rather limited supply of good arable soil, its historical record of agricultural problems, and its desire to develop an industrial economy, China attempted a most radical experiment. Several hundred million people were organized into co-operative farms. With more than 70,000 communes operating in present-day China, village life has changed in several respects. The following interview with a French agricultural expert who visited China illustrates the indirect impact of the struggle for survival as the most populated country attempts to deal with its traditional problems in a new way. The interviewer's questions are set in italics.

After travelling 10,000 miles, do you have the impression that China, though she's successfully tested a rocket with a nuclear warhead, is also solving the multiple problems connected with her economic development?

China is still basically a peasant nation, with 80 per cent of the population working in agriculture. True, the difference between Hopeh and Kwantung is as great as that between Denmark and Spain. Even the language differs: in the countryside near Canton, I needed two interpreters: one to translate the local dialect into Chinese, the other to translate from

Chinese into French. But throughout the country, the way of life and the motivation of the great mass of the population are those of a peasant society and are bound to remain so for a long time. This is a heavy burden on a country seeking fast economic growth so as to be on a par with the great industrial powers.

It is all the more serious because the environment is unfavourable to agriculture due to the frequency of natural disasters: drought, floods, cold in the North and typhoons in the South. To me, an agronomist, what such natural disasters mean is that harvests won't be reliable and yields

† Jean Chombart de Lauwe, "The Rocket's Off the Pad But What About the Paddies?" *Réalités* (May, 1967).



Food production is increasing in China, as evidenced by the displays at this open-air market in Shanghai.

can never be high unless a basic agricultural infrastructure is established throughout the country. This will be a long, costly job. I believe that the lack of such an infrastructure explains why so little land is worked: 260,000,000 acres for 700,000,000 inhabitants.

But what strikes the traveller most is the terribly poor transportation system in China. Railways are rare; the road network is unbelievably small. There are no cars on the roads, only a few trucks, often empty, for the Chinese are apparently not yet very competent at making efficient use of these vehicles. River transport comes to life when it rains and the rivers rise, but the merchant fleet is very primitive: a few big boats with engines, but mainly sail-propelled junks, rowboats and barges hauled by human beings.

If there are no modern means of transportation, how do these 700,000,000 people manage to trade with each other?

In the North freight is often hauled in little wagons pulled by horses and mules, but everywhere else man is the beast of burden. You see him carrying 100-pound

loads on his back along the dikes in rice fields, or pushing a bicycle with a sack weighing 200 pounds or pulling loads of hundreds of pounds in tiny two-wheeled carts.

I believe that, because of overpopulation, the small amount of land under cultivation, and the generally inadequate state of transportation, industries and general economic structure, China is the biggest underdeveloped country in the world today.

You visited twelve of the people's communes that were created in 1958 at the time of the Great Leap Forward and on which the regime staked such high hopes. What are the practical results of this reform?

In theory, the people's commune is the basic unit of Chinese society, grouping all agricultural and industrial activities. The alliance of factory and farm was supposed to close the gap between city and countryside, and between manual and intellectual work. In practice, it seems to me that the people's commune has become essentially a peasant institution to help stimulate farm production and educate farmers. Subsidiary activities like fishing,

the processing of farm products in small factories, maintenance of appliances and handicraft production are encouraged. The individual's basic needs are covered by community facilities: schools, hospitals, dispensaries, supply cooperatives for consumer goods and credit cooperatives to handle savings used to finance certain activities.

Today there are 74,000 people's communes in China with an average of 6,000 inhabitants each. But this average takes in a wide variation: of the communes I myself visited, the smallest had 9,000 inhabitants and the two biggest 55,000 and 73,000. This means that there are some big, well-organized communes and many very small ones that are not yet properly organized. Each people's commune is divided into ten brigades, each of which is then subdivided into ten teams. At the summit, there is the commune that owns the workshops, the heavy equipment, the supply cooperative and the social and cultural institutions.

The brigade, composed of about 1,000 workers, owns the land, the farm buildings, the light appliances and the draft animals. The Chinese would like the brigade, which holds the biggest share of collectively-owned property, to be the key level for management and the organization of work. But during my entire trip I saw only two cases in which the brigade was the main guiding force. Everywhere else, it was a team of about 100 workers who were assigned part of the brigade's land and buildings. In fact, this team is simply the old village in which everyone knows each other. That makes it easier to organize work.

Alongside collective land, there is in-

dividual property: eliminated in the enthusiasm of 1958, it was inevitably restored later. The peasant has a plot of land, a few tools and some domestic animals. The surface of the plot is determined by the number of members of his family with about fifty square yards allotted to each person. To the farmer, this is his own business, a micro-estate on which he still has his independence. To the regime, it is an embarrassing anachronism. Individual plots are grouped on land where collective farming would be inconvenient and, periodically, they are redistributed.

It goes without saying that these plots are cultivated very intensively. The owners put a great deal of work and effort into them and make liberal use of fertilizer, both human excrement and manure. To prevent the peasant from using all his fertilizer on his own private plot to the detriment of community-owned land, the authorities buy night soil and manure from him at relatively high prices.

You talked to these peasants, you visited their homes, you watched them work. How do they live?

They work hard. They do nearly everything by hand because mechanization is so undeveloped. In all China there are only about 100,000 tractors. Building and maintaining an agricultural infrastructure is back-breaking work—stone terraces have to be constructed, dikes have to be built in the ricefields. The shortage of fertilizer means a number of unpleasant tasks: you see farmers in a boat digging up mud from the bottom of a pond, loading it into the boat and hauling it ashore where women spread it out, dry it and

then add night soil or animal manure to it to make a usable fertilizer.

Members of a team work either all together, 100 at a time, or else in groups of ten, twenty or thirty. No one ever works alone. Contrary to what goes on in Russian kolkhozes, the leaders, who are all very young, work with the peasants on the same jobs.

Team workers are paid according to the work they have done on a system of quotas and points: one and a half points for harvesting thirty feet of a peanut row, three points for carrying 100 pounds of rice on your back, two for carrying it on a bicycle, and so on. At the end of the season a cash value is placed on points. One family's income can be as much as four times higher than another family's. It all depends on how many in the family are working. Besides, payment for work points is not the family's only source of income: there is the money earned by the private plot and, occasionally, income from certain other home activities, such as knitting or basket-weaving.

In the model communes that I visited the average family income was \$240 a year, but differences from one commune to another can be very marked. In the rich market garden communes around Shanghai the average income for a family of four to five persons was \$360 a year, while it was only \$180 in certain poor communes. Outside these model communes and in the poorest regions, family income is doubtless no higher than \$80 a year. But I could see that food prices were relatively low: a pound of rice was \$.05, of wheat \$.048, of pork \$.12 and of sugar \$.11.

In the communes that I visited the living standards of the peasants have certainly

gone up. New homes had been built, and everyone had something to eat. This improvement is reflected in savings: peasants make deposits (which are still very small) in a cooperative savings bank. A more primitive form of saving is hoarding rice and other grain. Every home has its supply at the foot of the master's bed. The authorities encourage such savings, occasionally with political arguments: it is good to have a food supply on hand in the event of war.

I visited the home of one peasant who had amassed 1,500 pounds of rice. It was obviously a sign of wealth of which he was very proud. Owning a wristwatch, bicycle or thermos bottle also confers the status of wealth. Though these are luxury objects, they are sold by the cooperatives in the model communes. When a peasant is able to buy such things, he shows them off gleefully. This is striking proof, even in China, that the main incentive to work is not revolutionary enthusiasm but money and consumer goods. The thermos bottle is particularly important because Chinese peasants do not drink tea, as one might believe, but hot water. The peasants I visited offered me nothing else: they drink it all year.

Are there still rich and poor, and social inequalities that cause tensions?

First, there are flagrant differences in living standards between regions without roads, electricity or irrigation systems and communes near big cities and in irrigated zones, where individual houses have electricity and often running water. But differences exist even in rich areas and social tensions quite obviously exist.

Shadow of Catastrophe over Calcutta

The village is not the only place where deprivation is felt in the lives of Asians. The cities have not solved the problems of hunger and poverty. Calcutta, the industrial center of India and one of the most populated metropolitan areas in the world, has hundreds of thousands of people living under extremely difficult conditions. Yet millions of Indians not only endure but accept these conditions as an unpleasant but natural part of life. Viewing the three thousand slums and the streets covered with mud, garbage, cowdung, and human waste is a shocking experience for most Westerners. When reading the following selection, consider the effects of this poverty-stricken life on the individual, and the challenge it presents for the survival of an entire city.

The Bengalis—the people of Calcutta—are a warm, friendly, hospitable people, though sometimes wary of strangers. About 42 per cent of the population is illiterate, yet Calcutta is a capital of culture. Its prose and poetry, mostly in the Bengali language, are perhaps the richest of India. It is a home of traditional music, revolutionary forensics, abstract painting and avant-grade drama. College Street, with its sidewalk bookstalls, resembles the Left Bank of the Seine.

Like New York, Calcutta is many cities. It is a hodgepodge of neighborhoods, each an integral part of the whole but also with an individual flavor. Its New Market and

bazaars are the delight of shoppers. It has a Chinatown with some of the best Mandarin and Cantonese cooking west of Hong Kong.

Calcutta is both a depressing and an exhilarating city; it throbs day and night with nervous energy. It excites the heart of a native New Yorker, one who exults in the awareness that he can always make new discoveries, that anything can happen at any time.

For the most part, however, the 270 square miles of the city and its suburbs are a jam-packed eyesore in which many of the 5,500,000 human beings there face a ceaseless struggle between life and death.

† Paul Grimes, "Shadow of Catastrophe Over Calcutta," *The New York Times Magazine* (Nov. 12, 1961).

Greater Calcutta is dotted with illegal squatters' colonies and 1,400 bustees—clusters of flimsy mud huts in each of which as many as ten persons sleep, cook, eat, argue and make love in the same room.

Thousands of persons have no homes at all. They exist in bamboo-and-burlap lean-tos they have erected on cement sidewalks. Naked children carry earthenware jugs to the street corners to get dubious water from municipally installed taps that often run dry. Their mothers cook on the pavement over smoky fire pots with cow dung as fuel.

Slum dwellers bathe and sometimes quench their thirst in stagnant, scum-covered ponds. Cholera, typhoid, smallpox, chronic dysentery and a host of other diseases thrive.

Many streets are maelstroms of buses, autos, trucks, streetcars, oxcarts, horse carriages, rickshaws, manually drawn wagons, stray cattle and great waves of pedestrians. When a car or bus halts at a traffic signal, beggars scramble to the windows to wail for alms. The big hotels, the air-conditioned bars, nightclubs and restaurants ring with the gaiety of the rich—Calcutta has extreme wealth, too. Outside waits a corps of panhandlers, pimps, would-be guides, souvenir salesmen who will fetch a taxi for 3 cents.

"With such problems," the editor of a Bengali newspaper said, "is it any wonder that there is tension and unrest? How would you feel if your life were an endless quagmire of poverty, filth and congestion—congestion at home, on the tram, in the canteen (lunchroom), even in the cinema, if you could afford to visit one? Would it take much prodding for you to revolt?"

Hardly a week goes by without a demonstration, mass meeting or strike in protest against what the instigators insist, rightly or wrongly, is injustice. Today the students are angry, tomorrow the stevedores, the next day the lighters of the city's 5,498 gas street lamps. Violence is infrequent, but occasionally it rages out of control.

How do Calcuttans view their city? A sampling shows that to different persons it means different things.

Take Lakshman Das, who lives in a bustee. Mr. Das, 35 years old, is a refugee from East Pakistan, one of the 4,000,000 Hindus who migrated from there to India. In his youth he farmed rice, but in Calcutta he is landless. So he and three neighbors operate a large wooden wagon that two men pull from the front and two push from the rear. They rent the wagon by the day for 60 cents and take it at dawn to the Sealdah railroad station. There they compete with hundreds of other coolies for assignments to transport mountains of freight across the city. Arguments erupt as the coolies jockey for positions. Sometimes a knife flashes.

If Lakshman Das is lucky, he may net 70 cents by nightfall. If he is unlucky, he will pray for tomorrow.

He shares a one-room hut in the bustee with his pregnant wife, their four children and his unemployed brother's family of three. They share a latrine—a ditch that rarely is cleaned—with twenty-seven other families. Mr. Das pays \$1.40 a month to a landlord who owns the property, erected the huts and forgot about them, except to collect the rent.

An adjacent hut is rented to twelve farmers from the near-by state of Bihar.

They left their families and meager, tired land in the care of brothers, to whom they send a few rupees a month from their earnings as coolies. Each year they return home to help harvest the mature crops and sow new ones. They use the bustee hut only to stow spare clothing. They prefer to sleep on the sidewalk, where occasionally there is a dusty breeze.

Mr. Das insists that he cannot honestly say he is dissatisfied. Yes, he would like to be certain that he will work tomorrow, but he does not crave much more.

"Sometimes the politicians come here," he says in Bengali. "They tell me there is a better life, that I must fight. Once I marched with them to the Government. We shouted and carried signs that I could not read. But all I got out of it was the loss of a day's pay."

Sometimes, Mr. Das admits, he sees the rich in their big cars, their women in saris of silk. "But what," he asks, "has that got to do with me?"

A far different Calcutta is that of Ajit Mukerjee, 19. Ajit—that is not his real name—is in his third year at a business college that crowds 2,000 students into two large lecture halls and twelve classrooms. He had difficulty gaining admission, but his father, a \$50-a-month clerk in a Government office, used political pull.

Ajit feels that a college degree is vital. "I may not find a job with one," he says, "but I would not stand a chance without one."

"What sort of job? With the Government, I suppose. Where else can I find security?"

He talks venomously of his home. "Grandparents, aunts, uncles, parents and nearly a dozen brats," he complains,

"all in three rooms. How can I study? Noise, noise, noise—day and night."

Ajit often cuts classes; he says he can buy notes just before exams. He prefers to spend his mornings sipping tea with classmates and gossiping about politics and sex. In the afternoon, if he can borrow a rupee, he goes to a movie—preferably a Hollywood film with "lots of girls." He says he is not a Communist, but he frequently attends Leftist meetings and takes part in demonstrations and strikes.

"What good is the Government?" he asks bitterly. "What is it doing for the student and the working man? It cares only about the rich."

He hesitates when asked what could be done by a Government that is short of funds and dedicated personnel and faces political pressures from many sides. Then he replies:

"You Americans, what do you care? Why should you help us? What tricks have you got up your sleeve?"

The impoverished refugee, the migrant coolie, the frustrated student—their are a few faces in the evergrowing crowd that jams Calcutta today. Some are sympathetic to the city's problems but feel helpless. Others, drawing upon talent and experience in municipal affairs, are trying to do what they can. Some, with an eye on the mountainous economic burdens and political pressures, feel the outlook is hopeless. Others do not care.

At the root of Calcutta's crisis is the fact that the city grew haphazardly from three marshy villages which Job Charnock, a British merchant, bought in 1690 for 16,000 rupees (then roughly \$5,000). One village was called Kali Kotta (abode of the Hindu goddess Kali), after which the city

may have been named (some historians dispute this). As the port developed, the city mushroomed. It became the headquarters of the British East India Company and was, from 1774 until 1912, the capital of India.

Wherever land was vacant, people settled. Only the Maidan was kept clear, because the British feared an attack on Fort William, which still stands on one side along the river.

After India became independent, the already jammed metropolitan area was swollen further by the influx of 1,500,000 refugees from what had become East Pakistan. Since then, tens of thousands of other job-seekers, forced off farmland by the pressure of population, have migrated to Greater Calcutta every year. Within the city limits, the population density has

grown to 75,000 persons a square mile, more than one-third greater than the density of Manhattan. About 25 per cent of the people live in slums.

In the words of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, the 79-year-old Chief Minister of the State of West Bengal, the population influx has led to "a deterioration of all economic values."

"It has created so much confusion," he was quoted as having told an Indian editor recently. "It has created psychological problems and has increased other difficulties for which we are desperately in search of solutions."

The Chief Minister cited the alarming increase in educated unemployed. He spoke of the unkindness of nature. All in all, he conceded, the mounting problems of Calcutta have "created a sort of a mess."



Home, for these children of Calcutta, is a flimsy lean-to covering a few square feet of cement sidewalk.

The Workers of Delhi, India

The Indian urban resident must often seek work in the various manufacturing or industrial organizations developing throughout the country. Labor is not expensive because of the urban migrations which are adding to the already large number of unemployed. The untrained and uneducated poor often experience extremely difficult working conditions. The following reading on working conditions in Delhi, as they existed a few years ago, reveals how far industry must progress before urban conditions can improve to the extent that they become appreciably more attractive than the rural communities.

I descended from my pump platform to start home, but first the workers wanted me to take a look at one more residential section. Their bustees, though overcrowded, at least had room enough so the workers could live with their families. But I had not yet seen the most typical quarters. I had not seen the “lines.”

The “lines” could hardly have been simpler. Striped across the hard earth of the large enclosure into which they led me was a series of long parallel walls, and efficiently lining both sides of each wall—so that the wall itself formed the backs of duplicate dwellings—were endless identical cells. Ram Das took me into one of these; it measured, I estimated, about nine by twelve feet. Although there was one window, which let a little late daylight into the

compartment, it took me a moment to comprehend the peculiar sight I saw on the floor: to grasp the fact that the tightly packed sausage rolls were sleeping men.

“Twenty-five men live in this room,” said Ram Das, and at the sound of his voice they began stirring and sitting up, and I could indeed see that these were men.

These were all weavers, I found, getting an average of thirty-five rupees a month, with the addition of the dearness allowance, which in this case amounted to forty-four rupees. The rupee is roughly equivalent to one third of a dollar, so translating this total into American dollars, each weaver received about twenty-six dollars a month, which had somewhat more buying power than that sum would have in America—

[†] Margaret Bourke-White, *Halfway to Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1949).

but not very much more. Being Indians, they had learned to get along on less. They paid rent for their floor space—not much—it amounted to two rupees and twelve annas each, or just under one dollar a month.

“Just imagine! We cannot even sit together!”

“How can we sleep? We sleep only because there are three different shifts in the mill, and when some of us are on the shift the rest will get room for sleeping.”

“Holidays are the most difficult. We cannot all sit down.”

“What do you do on your holidays?” I asked a boy whose age, I learned, was fourteen, yet whose pinched face could have been almost any age.

Young Jamnadas squirmed around on his bare feet, too shy to answer at first, but I persisted. “Do you play ball?” It was a cruel question. No, on holidays he did not play ball. Nor on Sundays. On Sundays and holidays he washed his clothes. He had gone to school up to the sixth grade, however, and his lusterless eyes picked up a spark of life as he recalled this. But no, Jamnadas could not remember when he had last played ball!

“Even smaller boys are working for eight hours in this mill,” said the weavers. “And they have no time to play either. None of us can play. How can we play? To play, one must get enough energy, and because grain is so dear now, we eat less. And because we eat less we can only do our duties in the mill. No more!”

Then there was the additional responsibility that most of these men had, Ram Das explained. There were families still living back in the home village who needed support. “Those who have families,” he

said, “are taking next to nothing and going about hungry.”

The impossibility of getting quarters where they could bring their families to live with them was their most acute grievance. These men, like fathers the world over, wanted the chance to see their children growing up around them. And with no wives to cook for them, there was often not enough time for standing in the pump queue and then the stove queue every morning—even if they clubbed together and had one man cook for several before rushing off to work.

But most of all, these men suffered from gnawing worry about their absent families, unsatisfied yearning for those who are close and dear. And in these troubled times their uneasiness was heightened by the possibility that religious rioting might break out where their families lived. This dread, added to their certain knowledge that the amount they could salvage from each week’s pay was not enough for their people back home to manage on, haunted their lives.

Women, carrying piles of dripping hides, flashed into sight for a moment as they passed through the sunbeams and then vanished as they moved into the darkness of the storage bins. The wet shoulders of children were touched briefly with gilt as they flung heaps of skins over the pit’s edge, climbed hastily out to an iron spigot, rinsed arms and legs, and scrambled back into the lime bath again.

“More than twenty minutes in the pit, and blood comes,” said Iyengar. “Then the skin of their hands and feet begins to peel.”

By now I had managed to focus [my

camera], and was shooting off a flashbulb here and there. The people did not act like those I had seen in other parts of India, where the sight of a foreigner draws spectators like a magnet and a camera arouses feverish curiosity. The leather workers hardly glanced up from their labor.

"If they don't complete their daily unit they don't get any pay," said Iyengar. "Then, too, there's the hope of overtime." He pointed to a group of women whose strained faces made them look fifty years old, but who probably—judging by the heavy work they were doing—were only half that age. He singled out one woman in a dull-blue, acid-stained sari, dragging a heap of black, reeking hides. "You see how far gone in pregnancy she is. She is sticking at her task as long as she can to help the family get overtime. Usually they all have to work together—mother, father, and children—to make it. Earning the overtime is difficult because they don't get any extra pay unless they can double the day's unit."

The basic unit, he told me, was one hundred skins. If the family, working as fast as they could and snatching as little time as possible for the necessary foot baths, totaled only one hundred and eighty skins, for example, they were paid only for the original hundred. But even if they completed the two hundred they received for the second cruel hundred only half the rate paid for the first.

"The most serious part of the speed-up is the temptation to neglect safety precautions," said Iyengar. "Every fifteen minutes they should come out of the lime bath and wash in a neutralizing bark solution. The soles of their feet and the palms of their hands corrode from staying in the

pits. And then, stripped to the waist as the children are, the concentrated lime begins wasting away the more delicate parts of their bodies."

The children were paid as little as six or seven rupees a month (two dollars or under) if they worked directly for the employer; they received no wages when they were brought in by the father in an effort to jack up his twenty-two rupee monthly wage with overtime. Children were in considerable demand by tannery owners throughout this whole part of Madras because the work of pressing down the hides was so simple that any youngster could do it, and their wages made hardly a dent in the payroll.

The new Constitution outlaws child labor in the "hazardous occupations," but so far the tanneries have escaped being classed as hazardous. The older Factories Act had already forbidden any employment of children under twelve: between twelve and eighteen they were classed as "juveniles" and permitted to work only "part time." "Part time" meant six hours in the acid pits instead of the nine to twelve which their parents worked. The Factories Act also provided for one day off every two weeks, but there was hardly a child who did not find himself working thirty continuous days to earn his pay.

"The inspector comes once a month," Iyengar told me. He doesn't question the workers. He has tea with the boss. Or if he goes into the factory, which is seldom, the smaller children are hurried out the back door, and the "juveniles" are given false names in case of questioning.

The Poor of Hong Kong

Hong Kong presents two views to the tourist. From one perspective it is a beautiful, sophisticated, and exciting city. From another perspective it appears as a crowded, problem-ridden, and impoverished home of vast numbers of destitute people. The following selection written by volunteers of a welfare group, relates the tragic problems of one refugee Hong Kong family. Keeping in mind the fact that this family's plight is shared by hundreds of thousands, consider the implications for the future of Asia.

The frail, young Chinese woman hesitantly pushed open the door of a hospital reception room in Hong Kong. She had come four times before and the answer was still the same. There was no room for her.

"Baby come now," she said, leaning heavily on the handle. Hospital authorities relented and rushed her into the maternity ward. Another pregnant woman got up to make room for her and then sat on the edge of the bed. And so young Chan Mui-po was delivered of triplets.

Two days later the following item appeared in the Hong Kong *Tiger Standard*:

A man yesterday wanted to give away his newly born triplets. His wife, ill with tuberculosis, died last night, after sixteen hours of labour. He stated he earned only U.S.\$1 per day and has four other children to support and wishes to give the triplets away to any charitable or missionary organization.

"I don't want any help from anybody," he said. "I only hope that someone will keep the babies. I cannot take them now that my wife is dead."

There were no takers for the infants. For several days the tiny boy and his two sisters lay side by side in their incubator. Then, as though sensing their unwantedness they went out of this life, one by one, as quietly as they had entered.

This was not a particularly unusual occurrence in Hong Kong. Personal tragedies numb the lives of hundreds of thousands who have fled from Communist China to this tiny British colony. Too many people cling to the edge of survival. Too many are living on sidewalks, on staircases, in basements, on rooftops, on rotting boats and in squatter colonies that consist of tens of thousands of flimsy structures thrown together from scavenged

† Karl Stumpf and Edward Gamarekian, "The Life and Death of Precious Plum Flower," *Saturday Evening Post* (April 4, 1964).

pieces of wood, bamboo, tar paper and tin. Water is so scarce that it is turned on only four hours a day every fourth day, and those who have to queue up at the public pipes get only about four pails per family—two for washing and two for cooking. Every year thousands of people die of tuberculosis, dysentery and other diseases.

And yet the refugees continue to come by tens of thousands. They would come by the millions if they could. Two years ago, when the Chinese government mysteriously let down its barriers, the flow of refugees grew so suddenly that the Hong Kong government decided to turn them back. Of the 70,000 who had newly crossed over, more than half were rounded up and shipped back to China, and the rest of the world protested in anger. Was this right or wrong? Who is to judge? Of the more than 3.6 million people here now, half are badly housed, badly clothed and badly fed. Maybe more. Can we take another half million or million? Should those who have so little be called upon to get along with less? Who is to say?

We who work for the Lutheran World Federation, one of dozens of welfare groups in Hong Kong, are simply trying to help in whatever way we can. We have seen the worst and have grown accustomed to it. We roll up our sleeves and work. The problem is so vast that we often feel we are fighting a raging fire with cups of water and teaspoons. It is that bad.

Hong Kong Island—Hong Kong means “fragrant harbor”—is an irregularly shaped 32-square-mile area, 11 miles long and two to five miles wide.

This is the city where Chan Mui-po came in search of a life in freedom. This is

where Chan Mui-po struggled for survival and lost. During 1949 and early 1950, three quarters of a million Chinese fled to Hong Kong. They were everywhere, packed 20 and 30 to a room. People huddled together in the corners of garages and basements, in tunnels and sewers—anywhere there was some overhead protection.

Unable to find a place to live, Mui-po's husband bought some used planks and pieces of galvanized iron and put up a tiny shack among the squatters in an area known as Shek Kip Mei. Thousands of others did the same, and soon there were more than 50,000 people crammed together on the 45 acres of land. Imagine all of the people of Tallahassee or White Plains squeezed together on a piece of land the size of about nine average city blocks. Their shacks were eight- or nine-foot square (less than the size of the average living-room rug) with up to nine or ten people in each. They slept on bare wooden platforms surrounded by boxes of belongings, without running water, toilets or baths, electric lights or sewers.

Mui-po's husband found a job in a small firm that made simple farm tools. He earned about 90 cents a day. Neighbors showed Mui-po herself how to assemble plastic flowers at home, and this brought in another 50 or 60 cents a day. The total income for the family of seven averaged about two dollars a day. Here Mui-po had her second son. Despite her hardships she was proud of him and full of hope for the future.

On Christmas Day, 1953, a careless match or an overturned kerosene lamp sent flames sweeping through the tinder-dry village of Shek Kip Mei. All that was

left the following morning was 45 acres of charred wood and ashes. Fifty-three thousand people were suddenly homeless and without food.

The Hong Kong government immediately set up a gigantic emergency feeding program. Did you ever see tens of thousands of hungry people queue up for food? It was an overwhelming sight to watch them standing there with buckets and brown paper bags in their hands as they waited patiently by the hour for a shovel-ful of steamed rice, some vegetables and a few cans of pork. They not only had to be fed but also had to be bedded down somewhere, and the government began construction of seven-story H-shaped blocks with eighty 10-by-12-foot cubicles on each floor.

Until the new buildings were finished, however, Mui-po's family had to split up. Mui-po, her husband and the two children moved in temporarily with some friends who were renting a section of the third-floor hallway in a nearby tenement. Then they learned that there was room on top of the adjacent tenement house. So the Liangs pooled all their resources, bought some wood, sheet metal and tar paper, and the entire family was reunited on the rooftop next door. Their one-room shack was slightly smaller than the one at Shek Kip Mei. There were 12 other families up there, leaving barely enough room to turn around, but they were all together once again, and this was all that mattered. When they were offered a cubicle in the new resettlement blocks put up by the government at Shek Kip Mei, they decided not to take it, since they were paying less rent where they were. It was here Mui-po had her third child, a girl. And here, a few

years later, another daughter arrived. The rest of the family moved over to make a bit more room.

One day the rooftop dwellers panicked. Without notice workmen began to tear down the building next door. The staircase in the building being demolished was the only access from the rooftop to the street. There was no other way down. Husbands were called from their jobs, and everyone started dismantling the shacks. With the clutter of wood, tin and tarpaper piled high on the sidewalk, and their personal belongings stacked alongside, the Liang family looked for a place to go. The rooftops they looked at were either barred to squatters or filled to capacity. Nearly 80,000 people were living on the tops of buildings at that point. Most of them are still there. There were also some 12,000 living on staircases and in basements, 25,000 sleeping in the streets, 68,000 others perched on verandas, 50,000 living in factories and stores that rent out bed spaces at night, and 140,000 more were sleeping in bed spaces in other people's cubicles, 20 or 30 packed into each room.

Mui-po's husband, unable to find a place for his family, put up a temporary shelter on the sidewalk, against the wall of a building. His brother and two sisters moved into bedspaces, leaving only the four children and Mui-po's mother-in-law to worry about for the time being. But the situation did not improve. People kept coming from China by the thousands, slipping over the border at night or around the border on fishing junks. And so the seven Liangs remained on the sidewalk. Mui-po's husband made their "home" as comfortable as possible with the materials at hand, and they settled down until some-

thing better could be found. Ten years had elapsed since their arrival, and the future was as uncertain as ever. Yet they still had hope.

That winter was an exceptionally cold one for Hong Kong. The temperature often went down to freezing. There was a kerosene stove to provide some heat, but the cold was too much for the ailing grandmother. She succumbed to an attack of pneumonia. Now there was no one left to look after the children. Mui-po had to give up the job she had found at a sweater factory, working six days a week for \$15 a month. To keep the older children in school—there were a few schools that were free, but these were filled to overflowing—she went back to making plastic flowers for five dollars a month. When her husband came home each night, they also made rice cakes and sold them to a street hawker for a penny each. They made ends meet.

But Mui-po then discovered she was going to have another baby—her fifth. She had a mild case of tuberculosis in one lung, and the pregnancy made it flare up. She became so weak that she could no longer work, and she was barely able to look after her family. At this point Mui-po came to our center for help. Our medical caseworker investigated, and we immediately gave the family a supplementary food allowance—four pounds of rice, eight pounds of bulgur wheat and three pounds of noodles a week. An examination in our clinic revealed Mui-po's tuberculosis, which required immediate treatment, but there was not a single bed available anywhere. Every hospital and treatment center had a waiting list. There are only 1,600 beds for TB cases in the colony; yet some 30,000

people are known to have the disease. Our own 45-bed hospital was full and has no facilities for treatment of TB anyway.

Mui-po received daily injections of antibiotics at our clinic, and we had all the children X-rayed. We discovered that the three oldest children had old TB lesions; the two-year-old had an active lesion, so we started to give her injections.

Mui-po lost her baby. Her bout with TB left her so weak that it would have been dangerous for her to have another child, so our caseworker referred her to the Family Planning Association. But Mui-po wanted to take more certain measures. Her friends told her that an operation would cost \$35, but she had no money. A government clinic told her they would do it free of charge, but only when there were six or more children in the family, so she was not eligible.

She went back to making plastic flowers to raise the money for the operation. Her health gradually improved, as did her spirit. The Liangs were all together once again, and the world seemed brighter. We dropped the family from our active list and shifted our attention to new cases—many of them even worse. The next time we heard of Mui-po was when we picked up the newspaper and learned of her death after she had triplets.

We in the voluntary organizations are doing everything we can to help, with the limited funds we have. As we try to provide our own small housing projects, small loans and grants, schools and clinics and social workers, mobile canteens that provide milk and protein cookies to children, hearts go out to these people who turn like sunflowers to any source of help.

The Causes of Hunger and Poverty in Asia



Man Against Nature

A farmer may suffer from too much water as well as from too little. The failure of less-developed Asian countries to develop a defense line against floods and droughts by constructing dams and irrigation systems is illustrated in the following reading about a flood disaster in an Indian village. When you consider that eighty percent of the people in India are engaged in agriculture, it is obvious how important climate is in Indian life.

Irrigation, of course, can revolutionize a peasant's entire life, but only to the extent that the peasant is willing. So can a flood, completely, overnight, and for many years to come. In a matter of moments it can drown a lifetime's hope and effort, and the man himself is a hapless victim.

The coastal *taluk*¹ of Ellamanchilli, in Vishakapatnam district of Andhra, lies between a range of hills and the sea. Within two arms of the Sarada river there are some 18,000 acres of rich and fertile paddy fields. October is usually wet here, and this year it had been abnormally so.

On [the] 21st of the month the noon-day meals were on the fire when the flood came, and it was impossible to hold it. The breaches in the protective *bund*² on the river were too wide and too many. Water

flowed over the embankment as well. In a matter of moments the people and their cattle were fleeing to higher lands. Entire villages were cut off and became little islands in an ocean of swirling muddy waters which flowed through village lanes like rivers.

On the seventh day of the flood we had to walk across several knee-deep channels and cross the river itself at two places where it had changed its course. While crossing it we walked over paddy fields, the paddy plants getting entangled in our toes. Everywhere was a stench of rot, and in the few fields which had emerged from under the flood the crop was yellow, turning brown. Acres and acres of fields, however, were buried deep under banks of pure white sand. Nothing will grow on them again till all the sand is removed and fresh soil is spread.

1. A hereditary estate belonging to a native proprietor.

2. An embankment.

† Kusum Nair, *Blossoms in the Dust* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1961).

Mamidivada, a typical village, is in complete ruin. In its *Harijan*³ section 40 out of the 56 houses have totally collapsed. In the rest of the village many huts have collapsed and many are severely damaged. The huts here are low and single-roomed, with round mud walls and conical roofs of palmyra palm leaves with a palm trunk pillar in the centre. Now the roofs are on the ground. Pieces of bamboo, broken pottery and a rubble of earth that were the walls is all that remains. In one cottage just one portion of the wall is still standing with a wide crack right down its middle; the wall is naked but for two small, colourful Kondapalle statuettes of Krishna and Radha nailed to it side by side.

Houses, however, can and will be rebuilt. Mud and thatch are easily replaceable. But to reclaim agricultural land from sand is very difficult, particularly for a man who has no resources. These same villages had suffered from a comparably severe flood in 1928. Many of the peasants, such as Satyanarayana and Mantri Sanyasi, had then migrated to Burma or Malaya, and from their earnings there plus loans they had gradually brought their lands back into cultivation. Many of them have not yet fully repaid those loans, and once again they face the same formidable problem. Overnight their lands have become valueless. Now they are older and have larger families to support. "Moreover, we cannot return to Burma or Malaya."

A pitiable case is that of Venkadurai. For many years he had worked as a coolie in Burma. He returned home, most of the way on foot, when Rangoon was bombed in World War II. He had been saving, however, and after his return he got

married and continued to work as an agricultural labourer. Meanwhile, six children were born to him, and he decided to purchase some land of his own. To his savings he added another borrowed 1,500 rupees and finally purchased one and a half acres of paddy land.

This was to have been Venkadurai's first crop of paddy from the first piece of land he had ever possessed. In a fortnight he would have harvested the crop. It had come up well.

But now it lies buried, partly under several feet of sand—he digs under to pull out a few dead plants—and partly under a deep flowing channel of water where the river has changed its course. He cannot save a single grain of that paddy, nor can he re-sow on an inch of the land. Tears roll down his deeply lined face. Four of his sons, all below ten and stark naked, stand around him, also weeping. In his arms he holds a small baby girl. He himself wears nothing but a brief loin cloth and a nose ring.

"I do not have even a clay pot left to cook in or a rag of clothing." His voice breaks.

Only the massive debt of 1,500 rupees remains. And Venkadurai is an old man now with more than 60 years behind him.

3. An Indian noun for the "Untouchables."

Climate and New Techniques

The impact of climate on the production of food has been known by all farmers since systematic farming started nearly ten thousand years ago. The more industrialized countries of today have generally managed to cope with a wide variety of climatic conditions, while the less-industrialized countries have generally been ineffective in controlling the often uncooperative forces of nature. The following excerpt by Chinese author, Mao Tun, describes a Chinese farmer's traditional resistance to new agricultural techniques developed to meet adverse climate and poor soil conditions.

He fancied himself a kind of elder statesman in agriculture, an old war horse who could find his way under any conditions. He talked ceaselessly to his daughter-in-law and Ah Sze about how the planting should be done. He told them how diligent he had been as a youth, how his grandfather had never lost heart but worked and worked until he had won security for the family.

One day, as Old Tung Pao returned from the fields, he shouted at Ah Sze:

"We'll transplant our rice sprouts tomorrow or the day after at the latest. Why haven't you figured out yet how much we'll have to spend for fertilizer? Have you lost your wits?"

"We still have a sack left from last year," his son replied listlessly.

The old man glared, furious. "That chemical stuff! Poison! Poison made by the foreign devils to kill people! I only know the bean-cake fertilizer our ancestors used. Fine, strong! That chemical powder ruins the land. Tomorrow, we'll buy bean cake!"

"Where will we get the money? People say that chemical fertilizer loses strength if you keep it too long; you have to add half as much new powder for it to be any good. But in our state, there's no use even thinking of that!"

"Poppycock and piffle!" roared the old man, shaking his finger under his son's nose. "According to you, we shouldn't plant at all! What are you going to eat if we don't plant? How will we pay off our debts?"

Ah Sze sighed. He knew the old man was

† Mao Tun, "Autumn Harvest," *Spring Silkworms and Other Stories* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1956).

right; it was only from the fields that they could earn their food and clothing, get money to return what they had borrowed.

When his son remained silent, the old man sulked, said he was “fed up with them.” The same afternoon, he went to town and complained to Ah Sze’s father-in-law and to Master Chen about how his son was “ruining the family.” Early the next morning he barged in on Master Chen and asked him for a loan. It wasn’t a large sum—only enough to buy a cake of pressed bean fertilizer. Old Tung Pao returned home with the bean cake, smiling all the way. After placing it on the porch, he turned to his daughter-in-law and Ah Sze and told them grimly:

“Until I’ve turned up my toes, you’ll listen to me! Don’t ask where I got the money. Just do your work!”

Now that the tender rice was sprouting in the fields, the illusions he had cherished during the silkworm season again flourished in his stubborn old brain. Bathed in golden sunlight, caressed by soft breezes, the rice grew extremely fast, almost as if someone were pulling it upwards. But the village stream rapidly shrank, and treadmills had to be placed on the embankment to push the water into the paddy fields. Ah Sze couldn’t manage their mill alone indefinitely, and Old Tung Pao tried to relieve him. But after a few minutes on the treadmill, the old man was panting hard, his back stiff, his legs aching. He had to come down and let his daughter-in-law take his place.

The rice grew like mad, and it consumed water like mad. Yet every day, like a fiery dragon, the sun drank of the little stream, steadily lowering its level. Everywhere in the village the cry was raised—“We need

help!” Everywhere people were begged to take a turn at the treadmill.

Each morning the clear blue of the sky made the peasants frown. A few white clouds at dusk would send the whole village into transports of delight. Old ladies would peer up near-sightedly, chanting thankful prayers. But always their joy proved premature. In almost a month they didn’t have a single drop of rain!

Old Tung Pao’s paddy field, being on high ground, was particularly difficult to manage. Muddy water had to be pushed up painfully from the drying stream through a ditch seventy feet long; the parched soil consumed half the water before it even reached the field. The rice shoots, originally so lusty, seemed stricken with anemia. They grew more brown and withered by the day. It hurt Old Tung Pao to see them; he stamped in helpless frustration. His son Ah Sze looked tragic but said nothing. His daughter-in-law said a great deal—all cold and biting. She predicted that this year’s harvest would be a miserable failure, a waste of effort; she bemoaned the new debt incurred for the bean cake!

“If we only had water, we’d have a fine crop,” the old man retorted weakly. He couldn’t bear listening to her any longer.

Only a trickle of water still flowed in the centre of the stream bed. The men attached three lengths of trough to extend their ditch to the shrunken stream. But a few hours later the water level had dropped so low that even Ah To, with his ox-like strength, couldn’t pump any water into their paddy field. About twenty yards to the west, the stream ran deeper—it was up to Ah To’s waist. But at that point there was no embankment on which to mount

the treadmill. Unless it rained that night, Old Tung Pao's rice would be finished.

Nor was his the only family in trouble. Every paddy field in the village was drying and cracking like an old tortoise-shell. People climbed high trees to peer at the distant horizons. There was not a speck of cloud in the wide blue sky.

The last remaining chance was to hire a "foreign pump" from town. Old Tung Pao was displeased when he heard the word "foreign"; he didn't believe the gadget could do much good anyhow. During last year's flood, peasants in a neighbouring village had hired the pump to free their inundated fields. Though he himself had not seen the pump in operation, Huang the Priest, who loved to poke his nose into other people's business, had praised it highly. But then it was only siphoning water out. Would it prove so effective when it had to pump water in—and over a distance of several hundred yards? Before he had a chance to express his doubts, however, his daughter-in-law spoke up grumpily.

"The foreign pump is good, but what about the hiring fee? We haven't any money! They say it costs over a dollar to fill one section of paddy field!"

Old Tung Pao couldn't make up his mind. He hurried to the dilapidated shrine of the God of Wealth near the little bridge outside the village, and banged his head against the ground in resounding kow-tows. "Display your power," he begged. "Give us some rain today!" He promised to offer a substantial sacrifice if his prayer should be answered.

That night, because there was no water left for the treadmill to pump, the family was able to sleep right through until

morning. But Old Tung Pao never closed his eyes. He heard a hissing sound of some sort and mistook it for rain. Bound-ing out of bed, he rushed to the porch for a look. It wasn't raining, but the sky was grey and overcast. Though disappointed, he clutched at this straw of hope and dropped on his knees and prayed. The third time he got out of bed to examine the sky, it was already light in the east. He hurried to the field to look at his precious crop. There had been some dew during the night; the rice seemed a little stronger than when he had last seen it—in the light of the pitiless sun. But the field was badly parched. Even when he put his fingers deep into the cracks he could feel no soft-ness in the soil. Old Tung Pao's heart thumped. He knew that in a short while the sun would come out and his rice would die. That would mean the end of him and his family.

He returned to the threshing ground in front of his door. A blood-red sun was just showing its head in the east. Weeds choked the trickle that remained of the stream. Some villagers had planted maize in the exposed stream bed; it was already as tall as a man. Half a dozen people were stand-ing beside the maize, arguing in loud voices. Old Tung Pao listlessly drifted over to them. They were discussing whether to pool their funds and hire the "foreign" pump. The man known as Li the Tiger was insisting:

"If we're going to hire it, we'd better be quick about it. That pump is kept busy every day. Last night, though, I heard that no one had hired it yet for today. We'll lose it if we don't hurry. Then we'll be in a fix. Will you come in for a share, Old Tung Pao?"

The old man stared straight ahead, as if he hadn't understood. Two things prevented him from replying—he was afraid the “foreign” pump wouldn't help, and he had no money. He figured it would be better to let others try the pump first. If it really worked, he could use it too. As to the money, perhaps he could manage a loan for a couple of days.

That morning, he and his family wandered through the paddy field as if keeping vigil at the bedside of a dying patient. The rice shoots went from bad to worse, drooping their heads at first, then finally bending in the middle. The soil emitted parched cracked sighs. Now the entire village was idle. Treadmills stood motionless; the stream was too low for them to be of any use. A few peasants stood on the small bridge outside the village, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the “foreign” pump—the doctor who could save their sick crops!

Toward noon, when the wretched sun was blazing like fire, the people on the bridge set up a cry: It's coming! . . . A small boat came sailing down the canal. On it was mounted an engine—the “foreign” pump! It didn't look particularly impressive, but people said it could pump water faster than eight robust young men. The whole village turned out, including Old Tung Pao and his sons. The boat did not land but remained floating in the canal. Several dozen yards of shiny rubber hose thick as a man's arm were unreeled. Then, one end was hauled ashore and hung over the embankment of a paddy field.

“The water will come out here and irrigate the field!” the operator from town announced dramatically.

Soon, the engine on the boat began to

pant like an old asthma victim and water spewed in jerks out of the rubber hose, then settled down to a steady flow. The peasants shouted and laughed for joy, forgetting that this water would cost money.

Standing off to one side, Old Tung Pao watched bug-eyed. He was sure some demon must be concealed in the noisy pump engine and the long snaky hose. Maybe it was the mud-fish spirit that inhabited the slimy pool in front of the village's Temple of Earth. The water probably was the saliva of the mud-fish spirit; tonight the spirit might decide to suck it all back. Then tomorrow the man could come from town again and swindle some more money!

But none of these suspicions could withstand the spreading expanse of green water. By the time the pump finished irrigating the second section of paddy field, Old Tung Pao decided to beg the assistance of this mechanized mud-fish spirit. He would take his hoe and guard his field all night just to make sure it didn't come sneaking through the darkness to steal back its saliva.

Without consulting either his son Ah Sze or his daughter-in-law, he got Li the Tiger and Huang the Priest to be his guarantors, and promised the pump operator to pay eight dollars after harvest plus twenty per cent monthly interest. The hose was then placed in his field.

An inch of oily green water covered Old Tung Pao's paddy land before sunset. Light breezes stirred ripples like the wrinkles on an old lady's face. Very happy, Old Tung Pao ignored his daughter-in-law's nagging protests—“Now we owe another eight dollars!” Of course eight

dollars was no small sum, but wouldn't they be getting at least ten dollars a load for their rice at harvest? Why, last year, even second-rate rice sold for ten and a half! Old Tung Pao's illusions had again taken full possession of him.

But Ah Sze still stared at the field mournfully. The rice continued to droop in spite of the water. It was too late. The sun had sapped the life out of the delicate shoots.

"Put a little chemical fertilizer on the rice tonight and tomorrow it'll be all right," said Ah To.

The unexpected sound of Ah To's voice in his ear made Ah Sze jump. That's right, they still had a sack of fertilizer! If they were ever going to use it, this was certainly the time. Spoil the land? So what! Use it!

But Old Tung Pao overheard Ah To's remark and rushed at him like a maddened tiger.

"That stuff is poison, you Long Hair spawn! Murderer! Do you want to spread poison?"

It took several people to hold off the old man and calm him down. There was no further talk about using the fertilizer.

"You'll see, by tomorrow morning the rice will be fine," Old Tung Pao said to Ah Sze, though not entirely pacified. "Chemical fertilizer! Poison!"

The old man vowed to himself he would guard his field that night if it killed him. Now he had not only the mud-fish spirit to fear, but also his sons. They might come and secretly sprinkle the powder while he slept. But the mud-fish spirit was what worried him most.

But the night passed peacefully. Neither the mud-fish spirit nor the unruly,

fertilizer-advocating brothers made any appearance. The rice still bent listlessly however, in fact a few stalks were in worse condition than the day before. Though the rice in other fields that had been irrigated was again green and strong, Old Tung Pao began to suspect the effectiveness of the mud-fish spirit's saliva. Meanwhile, his sons had gone to work spreading the fertilizer. The old man kept his eyes averted from their direction. He didn't want to see.

Fortunately, the next two days a curtain of clouds protected the fields from the blistering sun. About half an inch of water still remained on the paddy ground. The rice became green once again. While the old man would not give any credit to the chemical fertilizer, he no longer said it was poison. After the cloudy weather, a fine rain fell, followed by bland sunny days. The rice flourished and the peasants sighed with relief. Their lives were saved. The Old Lord of the Sky had taken pity on them!



Traditional Thought and Science

Changing the customs and habits of people is extremely difficult. This is especially so if the people do not clearly understand the reasons for change. In studying the Indian village of Rampur, Oscar Lewis questioned members of the Jat, Brahman, and Camar castes about a variety of health problems. He recorded the following revealing exchange in response to the question "How can you prevent smallpox?" Answer: "I don't know." Question: "Haven't you heard of vaccination?" Answer: "Yes, the children in the school get it, but how will that help? Everything is God's will." The historical cause of smallpox is the goddess Sitala (sometimes called Mata or Devi), according to the villagers who feel that vaccination disturbs the goddess. One traditional explanation for typhoid is that the goddess Kanti Mata causes the disease, but another explanation claims that evil spirits are responsible, and Kanti Mata drives them out. The following are excerpts from the interviews.

Smallpox

A Camar: "In smallpox there are blisters all over the body. The blisters contain water. The patient becomes very weak. The pain develops later on in blisters. It is accompanied by a slight temperature. At times the patient may be under the influence of an evil spirit. Even after the ghost is driven away through the help of a curer, there is an increased likelihood of his falling ill with smallpox."

Q. "What is the treatment?"

A. "Ashes are applied to the blisters after they have been screened through a cloth. Cow dung is plastered over the floor. Efforts are made to observe cleanliness near the patient. After he has recovered, the patient is taken to the village goddess. She is given offerings of *gulgulas*,¹ *patasas*,² and glass bangles. Some of the food is eaten by the dogs; the rest is given to the Bhangis."

1. An Indian cake.

2. Indian sweets.

[†] Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1958).

Q. "Is the patient segregated?"

A. "No, we feel no particular fear."

Q. "If a man gets smallpox, are other people also apt to suffer during that period?"

A. "Yes, sometimes it spreads."

Q. "Why does it spread?"

A. "It is generally in summer. It spreads from some foul air from the disease. As long as the patient does not recover completely, he does not have his hair cut, a shave, or a bath. After his recovery, water from the Ganges is sprinkled over him, so that he may become pure. In the village the people who are more well-to-do have their children vaccinated, but the poor do not."

Q. "Do they have to pay for the vaccination?"

A. "Yes. And we cannot bear that expense."

Q. "Do you believe that it works?"

A. "Yes. When there is a smallpox epidemic, people who have been vaccinated usually escape."

A Jat: "In smallpox there are blisters all over the body. I can't say if the patient suffers with fever, as there have been few cases in the village. If the illness is light, the patient may recover after four to five days. It is said that only those people get it who have not been vaccinated. The patient may sometimes lose his eyesight. He feels a burning pain all over his body. If it attacks the tongue, the patient may become dumb for the rest of his life. I don't know what causes it."

Q. "What is vaccination?"

A. "I don't know about it. Some liquid from a file is applied on the arm, and a scratch is made with a knife, so that it

may mix with the blood. If a patient gets the disease, he is made to lie on screened ashes, so that if a blister bursts, the matter won't come into contact with some other part of his body. Food which produces matter in the body is not given to the patient. Flies are not allowed to sit on him. A vow is taken by the patient's relatives that if he recovers they will offer *gehna* to the goddess Devi. *Gehna* consists of $5\frac{1}{4}$ *sirs*³ of wheat, one *gur*⁴ cake weighing about 4 *sirs*, and 4 *annas*.⁵ Some take a vow to go to Gurgaon and give an offering of 5 to 20 rupees' worth of sweets, or even more. Women sit together at night and sing songs in praise of the goddess of Gurgaon, and pray to her to give relief to the patient."

A Brahman: "When the patient has fever for two or three days and makes no effort to treat it, but instead takes a cold bath after working, this disease may develop inside his body. The heat comes out of the body in the shape of blisters. If, at such a time, the stars are also unfavorable, they also play a part in developing the fever into smallpox."

Q. "What is done to right the unfavorable influence of the stars?"

A. "When the blisters appear, people vow to offer *gehna* to Mata. So long as the patient does not recover, Mata is bathed daily in the morning and evening. If the pundit asks for an offering of sweets to be made to Mata during the illness, that is also done."

Q. "Is the disease caused by the anger or dissatisfaction of Mata?"

3. An Indian measure of weight.

4. An Indian word meaning "sugar."

5. Four annas are the equivalent of five cents.

A. "No. But *gehna* is offered to get her help in driving the disease away."

Q. "If there is a case of smallpox, does it spread?"

A. "No."

A female Jat: "In smallpox there are blisters all over the body. The patient has fever. There is a burning pain all over the body. From the appearance of the blisters to recovery might take fifteen to twenty days."

Q. "How is it caused?"

A. "I don't know. But if a healthy person comes in contact with the patient, he can also get the disease. It can fly from one to the other."

Q. "How is it treated?"

A. "A small brick is heated in the fire, and cow's urine is dropped over it. The brick is brought near the patient, so that the vapors reach his body. This is supposed to bring relief."

Q. "Why is cow's urine used and not that of buffaloes?"

A. (The informant laughs.) "The cow is the most sacred animal, and only the cow's urine has curative value."

Q. "What other diseases are cured by cow's urine?"

A. "It is said that if a man suffers from liver trouble, some cow's urine should be given him with a little salt to drink, for a period of four or five days. When there is a vaccination, the place is exposed to the vapors of cow's urine. That is supposed to bring relief."

Q. "Why are vaccinations given?"

A. "It is said that they give protection against smallpox."

Q. "Does vaccination [give] protection?"

A. "In most cases it does, but in others it does not."

Q. "Are there cases of vaccinated persons getting smallpox?"

A. "Yes, there have been many such cases."

A Jat: "No medicine of any kind is given for smallpox, but every day, early in the morning, as soon as the mother gets up, she takes some gram, wheat, or *haldi* [different on different days], and goes to the outskirts of the village, where she places the grain in five groups—five handfuls. This is done for five days in this form:



The grain is removed, a little at each time, with the hope that the smallpox will similarly go down."

Typhoid

A Camar: "In typhoid there are something like sand particles on the front portion of the neck and chest. The patient feels discomfort and at times loses consciousness. He begins to talk as if he were dreaming something. He has a slight temperature. There is sometimes pain in the ribs. There is a repellent smell from the patient. Mostly, it is due to the influence of evil spirits. The patient gets fever from them. Then the goddess, Kanti Mata, appears in the shape of sandy particles on the chest. It is believed that she comes to drive away the evil spirits."

Q. "Before the goddess appears, how do you know that the patient is suffering from typhoid?"

A. "If the patient's fever does not go down for two or three days, the people go to visit a pundit or a curer. He tells them that the patient is suffering from the influence of evil spirits. They set aside an offering to Kanti Mata consisting of *gulgulas*, *patasas*, and coconut. This is given to the goddess after the patient has recovered. No other treatment is followed. Cleanliness is observed, however, and fruits like grapes are given to the patient. After browning flour on the fire, sugar and some milk are added to it, and the mixture is given to the patient to eat. In seven or eight days the marks on the chest become black, and the patient recovers. Sometimes he may not recover for a month, if the shadow of a person in new clothes falls over him. *Nim*⁶ leaves are hung by the door to keep away evil influences. Some incense is burned. Such a shadow is very dangerous and may lead to the death of the patient. Therefore foreign people and men or women who may be wearing new clothes are not allowed to enter the patient's room."

Q. "What sort of cleanliness do you observe?"

A. "Cow dung and mud are applied to the floor of the patient's room. Water is kept for his use in a new earthen pot. Clean clothes are provided for him."

Q. "What is the use of cleanliness?"

A. "So that flies may not collect in swarms. Cleanliness is generally beneficial in this disease."

Q. "Why should flies be avoided?"

A. "Flies cause dirt. They also worry the

patient through their bites."

A Jat: "In typhoid the person has a high temperature, and there are eruptions on the chest and stomach. The person may get better in ten days, but sometimes he may have to lie in bed for a much longer period. I don't know what causes it. In the morning the person is all right, and in the evening he goes to bed with fever. A doctor or *hakim* is not usually consulted."

Q. "What sort of treatment is given?"

A. "We always try to do something which will make the eruptions come out soon. If this is done, the person feels relieved. For instance, gold jewelry can be washed in water, and the water given to the patient to drink."

Q. "How does this help?"

A. "It does, though I cannot say why. I only know it is good medicine."

Q. "What else is done?"

A. "A brick is heated and made red-hot. In the night, when the whole village is quiet, and there is nobody roaming about, the red-hot brick is removed, placed on a *thali*,⁷ and a little cow's urine is dropped on it. This *thali* with the red-hot brick and urine is placed in front of the patient, who is fully covered up. He is made to stay in this hot vapor for some time."

Q. "Why is this done?"

A. "It is done to drive away the effects of an unclean shadow. For this disease especially, the shadow of an unclean person has a very bad effect, and much care should be taken to see that no shadow falls on one. Besides this method, another is to smoke the dung of donkeys in the room."

Q. "What medicine is given to the patients?"

6. An Indian plant.

7. An Indian word for "metal plate."

A. "*Kondra*, a wild herb, is mixed with *gangajal* [holy Ganges water], and the person drinks it."

Q. "What diet is given?"

A. "The patients are not able to eat anything. They are given only water, and milk in a diluted form. Sometimes *bajra* porridge, made very soft, is given, because this will help the eruptions to fall off soon."

Q. "Are there any steps taken by the doctors to prevent typhoid?"

A. "I don't know what is done in the case of typhoid; but I know that in small-pox, vaccination is given, and it has no good effect."

A Jat: "A person can only tell that he has typhoid after a few days. At first it looks as though he were suffering from excessive heat. After a while his temperature goes up, and he has a slight cough. Later, spots like prickly heat appear on his neck, chest, and stomach, and he feels dizzy and has a headache."

Q. "What causes it?"

A. "Who can say? A person is feeling all right; then suddenly he is down with fever."

Q. "Has it anything to do with food or water?"

A. "No."

Q. "Is a doctor consulted?"

A. "No."

Q. "Why not?"

A. "Because everything depends on the will of God, and who can help a dying man?"

Q. "But is nothing done to relieve the pain?"

A. "Yes, the patient is kept warm and looked after. If he is exposed to the cold, his body may become twisted and

deformed. The mouth may become crooked. If that happens, the affected part is massaged."

Q. "If no doctor is called, how does one get well?"

A. "We leave it in the hands of God. We pray to God that if the patient recovers, sweets will be distributed. If a person is rich, he may buy sweets and distribute them to the children of the village. If one is poor and cannot afford to spend a lot, then a rupee and 4 annas are tied up in a cloth. This is either worn around the neck of the patient or set aside in a safe place until he recovers. Once the patient is all right, the money is spent for sweets, and they are distributed to some children."

Q. "Can typhoid be prevented?"

A. "No, I don't think so."



A nurse checks villagers for malaria, a disease that killed one million Indians in 1946. The death rate has been reduced drastically over the last two decades.

“Let All Things Old Abide”

William and Charlotte Wiser, two American missionaries who for many years lived in an Indian village, recorded and translated their conversations with Indian villagers. While these comments on local barriers to change and progress represent attitudes of more than a generation ago, village leaders of today hold many similar opinions.

“To a newcomer we may seem suspicious, obstinate, intolerant, backward—everything that goes with refusal to change. We did not choose these characteristics for ourselves. Experience forced them upon our fathers. And the warnings of our fathers, added to our own experiences, have drilled them into us. Refusal to change is the armor with which we have learned to protect ourselves. If we and our fathers had accepted the new ideas and customs commended to us, we might have made greater progress. But greater progress would have drawn the eyes of a covetous world toward us. And then our lot would have been worse than before. Where are the cities that flourished for a time? In ruins. While they climbed to great heights and fell to the depths of destruction, we kept to the old reliable level. And we have survived. We are not blind to the advantages of the new, but unless we know just where it will lead us, we prefer to let it pass us by.

“At times you cannot hide your impatience with our caution. There was the plow which you urged us to accept. You saw only the advantages it offered in turning our soil during the months when it has always lain packed and hard. We saw beyond that. We felt the added perspiration of working in the killing sun of June, and saw the risk of exposing our bullocks to the cruelty of heat and sun, especially when they are hardly strong enough to pull such a plow. You know how we dread the sickness or loss of an animal. We knew the weight of the plow and foresaw the difficulties of carrying it on our shoulders from one small plot to another far away. And we saw the eyes of rent collectors, greedily watching the results of our added toil. We were sorry to disappoint you, but we could not risk such an expensive and doubtful experiment, when the benefits would most likely not stay with us. The plow that Bala’s brother won at your exhibition last spring is better. It is light,

† William and Charlotte Wiser, *Behind Mud Walls, 1930-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964).

like our plows, and good for ordinary plowing. But Bala's brother has not dared to use it. He is so prosperous that he is afraid of anything that makes a show of still greater prosperity. In that he may seem foolish to you. But we do not blame him for his caution.

"When you insisted upon entering your *bhangī*¹ pastor's boy in school, we set up all the defenses our intolerance could supply. All our lives we have watched *bhangis* at their defiling work. No matter how much you clean them up and change their names, they are repulsive to us. From the time when our earliest impressions were formed we have despised them. You can let yourself forget the work which they do, and the flesh of swine which they eat. We cannot. Much more important than this is the change which might come from their new way of living and thinking. *Bhangis* might prove troublesome if not kept *bhangis*. They must stay where they have always been, and remain content with the work which is theirs to do. If they want to rise to something better, who then will keep our village clean? Each of us has been born to his appointed task. Perhaps we are what we are because of former lives. We do not know. Everything is in the hands of the gods. But this we do know: The old order has served us well for centuries. It has provided a task for everyone who is born into it. And it has provided for the carrying out of every task needed for village self-sufficiency, by men trained from childhood. If change once begins, how far will it go? What if *bhangis* should try to be farmers, and farmers try to be carpenters, and carpenters try to be teachers? There would be

1. An Indian word meaning "sweeper."

confusion and wrangling, and work badly done. No, the old order with its unalterable allotments is much more satisfactory.

"If we can assure ourselves that the better implement or the more generous custom will lead to no harmful consequences to ourselves, we may try to make it ours. We have replaced many of our charms with treatments which you or your doctors have advised. We have made changes in our houses, because we have seen that they are good and that they involve no risks. We are sowing new seed because we have been shown the better crops on the demonstration farm. You must be patient with our slowness and caution. An arm that has long been held stiff cannot be bent without effort and complainings. Our sons with their reading and their larger world may insist upon more changes. If so, we pray that they may have means of self-protection to cover their progress. For us who are not wise in the ways of the new world, the old, well-measured ways are safest.

"Our walls which conceal all that we treasure, are a necessary part of our defense. Our forefathers hid themselves from a covetous world behind mud walls. We do the same. Barriers are no longer needed as protection against cruel raiders. But they are needed against those ruthless ones who come to extort. For the old purpose, our fathers built their walls strong enough to shut out the enemy, and made them of earth so that they might be inconspicuous. For the present purpose they must remain inconspicuous and yet be high enough to conceal us and our possessions from the greedy ones. But now they are better protection if instead of being kept strong they are allowed to

become dilapidated. Dilapidation makes it harder for the covetous visitor to tell who is actually poor and who simulates poverty. When men become so strong that the agents of authority work with them for their mutual benefit, they dare to expose their prosperity in walls of better materials and workmanship. But if the ordinary man suddenly makes his will conspicuous, the extortioner is on his trail. You remember what a short time it was after Puri put up his imposing new veranda with a good grass roof, that the police watchman threatened to bring a false charge against him. He paid well for his show of progress. Old walls tell no tales.

"In all of our self-protective activities, each of us is not thinking of his own self. No villager thinks of himself apart from his family. He rises or falls with it. In the cities families are scattering. But we need the strength of the family to support us. We do not trust the outside world, and we are suspicious of each other. Our lives are oppressed by mean fears. We fear the rent collector, we fear the police watchman, we fear everyone who looks as though he might claim some authority over us; we fear our creditors, we fear our patrons, we fear too much rain, we fear locusts, we fear thieves, we fear the evil spirits which threaten our children and our animals, and we fear the strength of our neighbor. Do you wonder that we unite the strength of brothers and sons? That man is to be pitied who must stand alone against the dangers, seen and unseen, which beset him. Our families are our insurance. When a man falls ill, he knows that his family will care for him and his children until he is able to earn again. And he will

be cared for without a word of reproach. If a man dies, his widow and children are sure to the protection of a home. To make certain of meeting the needs of our families in times of stress, we want hidden silver and we want land. These will preserve us from starvation through all trials. The village has survived the coming and going of many landlords and many rulers by remaining inconspicuous and providing its own sustenance.

"You and others have told us that with newer methods we would be spared much labor. Perhaps, but we do not fear work. You have seen us go out to our irrigation wells at dawn and return at dusk, day after day through chilly winter months. You have watched us driving our bullocks slowly round and round over the threshing floors through the sun and wind of scorching April days. During suffocating June weather you have watched us repairing our roofs and our house walls. Then with the coming of the rains you have seen us back in the fields with our plows. And you know that those of us who care for the crafts, do not idle when trade is slack, but work long hours in the fields. We are well acquainted with toil. It has always been with us. But these new ideas of more results from less labor are untried and confusing. How do we know that they will not leave some of us without employment? You must give us time to weigh them and their consequences.

"If we do not provide for ourselves completely, who will? Among those who might be expected to take an interest in us, who is there who demonstrates any desire to help? In the cities they devise ways of exploiting us. We know how to drive bargains when we sell our wheat or our sugar

cane. We are at home in the wholesale market. But when we get our money and want to take home some cloth, the shopkeepers get out the pieces which they have been unable to dispose of, and persuade us to buy them at exorbitant prices. We know they are laughing at us. But we want cloth, and the next shopkeeper will cheat us as badly as the last. Wherever we go in the town, sharp eyes are watching to tempt our precious rupees from us. There is no one to advise us honestly or to help us escape from fraudulent men. When we go to town to attend the courts, there are men everywhere waiting to take advantage of our ignorance and fear. Our lawyers charge fees which they know are beyond our means to pay. And then if we win a case they think they deserve an extra large

gift. Sometimes there is a sincere helper among them, but we are never sure who is what.

"There is no one outside of our own group whom we dare trust. Everyone who comes to us or to whom we go, thinks of what he can get from us—be it money, or grain, or personal glory. You may call us stubborn and backward and hard. But we have learned bitter lessons, we and our fathers. Those lessons have made us cautious. We know that we cannot make much progress with our limited experience and resources. But we ask just where would progress lead us? We feel safe behind the barriers of our mud walls and our present status. And we are uneasy when you or our sons propose a change."



Even though scientific ways of farming have been introduced by the Indian government, many farmers are still using primitive farming methods and poor equipment.

The Tenacity of Tradition

One who comes into a village or farm community from the outside with new ideas often has extreme difficulty inducing changes. Likewise, the insider who attempts to alter traditional patterns of human behavior faces the possibility of extreme opposition and antagonism. In the following reading, an Indian villager attempts to break century-old rules of tradition by employing an unprecedented technique—going on strike.

The hot dry season in India . . . a corrosive wind drives rivulets of sand across the land; torpid animals stand at the edge of dried-up water holes; newspapers report that in the east wells are empty and villagers have left their fields. The earth is cracked and in the rivers the sluggish, falling waters have exposed the sludge of the mud flats. Throughout the land the thoughts of men turn to water. And in the village of Rampura these thoughts are focused on the village well.

It is a simple concrete affair, built upon the hard earth worn by the feet of five hundred villagers. It is surmounted by a wooden structure over which ropes, tied to buckets, are lowered to the black, placid depths twenty feet below. Fanning out from the well are the huts of the villagers—their walls white from sun, their thatched roofs thick with dust blown in from the fields.

At the edge of the well is a semicircle of earthen pots and, crouched at some distance behind them, a woman. She is an untouchable—a sweeper in Indian parlance—a scavenger of the village. She cleans latrines, disposes of dead animals and washes drains. She also delivers village babies, for this—like all her work—is considered unclean by most of village India.

Her work—indeed, her very presence—is considered polluting, and since there is no well for untouchables in Rampura, her water jars must be filled by upper-caste villagers.

There are dark shadows under her eyes and the flesh has fallen away from her neck, for she, like her fellow outcastes, is at the end of a bitter struggle. And if, in her narrow world, shackled by tradition and hemmed in her poverty, she had been unaware of the power of the water of the

† Peggy and Pierre Streit, "Village Well: Drama of India," *New York Times Magazine* (Sept. 20, 1959).

well at whose edge she waits—she knows it now.

Shanti is 30 years old, deserted by her husband, supporting three children. Like her ancestors almost as far back as history records, she has cleaned the refuse from village huts and lanes. Hers is a life of inherited duties as well as inherited rights. She serves, and her work calls for payment of one chapatty—one thin wafer of unleavened bread—a day from each of the thirty families she cares for.

But this is the hiatus between harvests; the oppressive lull before the burst of monsoon rains; the season of flies and dust, heat and disease, querulous voices and frayed tempers—and the season of want. There is little food in Rampura for anyone, and though Shanti's chores have continued as before, she has received only six chapatties a day for her family—starvation wages.

Ten days ago she revolted. Driven by desperation, she defied an elementary law of village India. She refused to make her sweeper's rounds—refused to do the work tradition and religion had assigned her. Shocked at her audacity, but united in desperation, the village's six other sweeper families joined in her protest.

Word of her action spread quickly across the invisible line that separates the untouchables' huts from the rest of the village. As the day wore on and the men returned from the fields, they gathered at the well—the heart of the village—and their voices rose, shrill with outrage: a *sweeper* defying them all! Shanti, a sweeper *and* a woman challenging a system that had prevailed unquestioned for centuries! Their indignation spilled over. It was true perhaps, that the sweepers had not had

their due. But that was no fault of the upper caste. No fault of theirs that sun and earth and water had failed to produce the food by which they could fulfill their obligations. So to bring the insurgents to heel, they employed their ultimate weapon: the earthen water jars of the village untouchables would remain empty until they returned to work. For the sweepers of Rampura the well had run dry.

No water: thirst, in the heat, went unslaked. The embers of the hearth were dead, for there was no water for cooking. The crumbling walls of outcaste huts went untended, for there was no water for repairs. There was no fuel, for the fires of the village were fed with dung mixed with water and dried. The dust and the sweat and the filth of their lives congealed on their skins and there it stayed, while life in the rest of the village—within sight of the sweepers—flowed on.

The day began and ended at the well. The men, their dhotis wrapped about their loins, congregated at the water's edge in the hushed post-dawn, their small brass water jugs in hand, their voices mingling in quiet conversation as they rinsed their bodies and brushed their teeth. The buffaloes were watered, their soft muzzles lingering in the buckets before they were driven off to the fields. Then came the women, their brass pots atop their heads, to begin the ritual of water drawing; the careful lowering of the bucket in the well, lest it come loose from the rope; the gratifying splash as it touched the water; the maneuvering to make it sink; the squeal of rope against wooden pulley as it ascended. The sun rose higher. Clothes were beaten clean on the rocks surrounding the well as the women gossiped. A

traveler from a nearby road quenched his thirst from a villager's urn. Two little boys, hot and bored, dropped pebbles into the water and waited for their hollow splash, far below.

As the afternoon wore on and the sun turned orange through the dust, the men came back from the fields. They doused the parched, cracked hides of their water buffaloes and murmured contentedly, themselves, as the water coursed over their own shoulders and arms. And finally, as twilight closed in, came the evening procession of women, stately, graceful, their bare feet moving smoothly over the earth, their full skirts swinging about their ankles, the heavy brass pots once again balanced on their heads.

The day was ended and life was as it always was—almost. Only the fetid odor of accumulated refuse and the assertive buzz of flies attested to strife in the village. For, while tradition and religion decreed that sweepers must clean, it also ordained that the socially blessed must not. Refuse lay where it fell and rotted.

The strain of the water boycott was beginning to tell on the untouchables. For two days they had held their own. But on the third their thin reserve of flesh had fallen away. Movements were slower; voices softer; minds dull. More and more the desultory conversation turned to the ordinary; the delicious memory of sliding from the back of a wallowing water buffalo into a pond; the feel of bare feet in wet mud; the touch of fresh water on parched lips; anticipation of monsoon rains.

One by one the few tools they owned were sold for food. A week passed, and on the ninth day two sweeper children were down with fever. On the tenth day

Shanti crossed the path that separated outcaste from upper caste and walked through familiar, winding alleyways to one of the huts she served.

"Your time is near," she told the young, expectant mother. "Tell your man to leave his sickle home when he goes to the fields. I've had to sell mine." For it is the field sickle that cuts the cord of newborn babies in much of village India. Shanti, the instigator of the insurrection, had resumed her ancestral duties. The strike was broken. Next morning, as ever, she waited at the well. Silently, the procession of upper-caste women approached. They filled their jars to the brim and without a word they filled hers.

She lifted the urns to her head, steadied them, and started back to her quarters—back to a life ruled by the powers that still rule most of the world: not the power of atoms or electricity, nor the power of alliances or power blocs, but the elemental powers of hunger, of disease, of tradition—and of water.



Village of Hunger and Lethargy

What frequently confuses the Westerner about the less-developed Asian countries is that often in the face of agricultural, and thereby personal, tragedy, the Asian farmer somehow fails to perform tasks which would improve or even save his valuable crops. The example of Basehra, India, will help you understand the reasons for the apparent lethargy and the failure to act aggressively.

Like many villages throughout India, this cluster of mud houses straddling the tar road 30 miles east of Allahabad had virtually no monsoon last year. Instead of the 37 inches of rain which normally fall on this section of Uttar Pradesh state, Basehra got only 11 inches—barely enough to water down the layer of chalky dust which covers the village's narrow, winding paths.

This summer's monsoon has been disappointing too.

A few showers have spread a thin sheen of green across the fields but, the scorched, cracked earth is plainly visible under the scraggly grass.

This is Basehra's testing time. The effects of last year's drought are most severe now, just before the fall harvest, for whatever meager stocks of grain the villagers had accumulated have now been exhausted. Moreover, these weeks will determine the

strength of this year's monsoon and the fate of the coming crop.

Basehra's farmers are almost totally dependent on rainfall. There are only four irrigation wells in the village. A canal flows through Basehra's fields, but almost all the village's land is above the canal, and there are no pumps to boost the water up. The villagers squat in their dusty fields and watch their children and the black water buffaloes splashing in the useless water.

Everyone agrees the past year was "very bad" for Basehra. Officials estimate that the village's total crop of rice, wheat, barley and other food grains was only about 50 tons compared to about 220 tons in a normal year.

Many of the village's 850 persons live close to the subsistence level, and the margin has been sharply whittled down during the last few months. There has

† J. Anthony Lukas, "Village of Hunger and Lethargy," *New York Times Magazine* (Oct. 2, 1966).

apparently been an increase in diseases caused by malnutrition, insufficient water and impure food. Night blindness, anemia, rickets and dysentery are rife, and Basehra had five serious cases of typhoid in July and early August. Many of the lower-caste children have bloated bellies, symptomatic of a severe protein deficiency which can cause permanent physical defects. These are danger signals whose real meaning may only be read in months and years to come.

About half of the households in the village are landless, chiefly the lower castes—the Chamars (traditionally leather workers), the Kols (farm laborers), the Lohars (blacksmiths), the Kahars (watermen) and the Khatiks (weavers). The landowners are those of the middle castes, like the Ahirs and the Kushwahas, and the upper castes—the Brahmans, the Kaisthyas and, particularly, the Thakurs.

The Thakurs, a subdivision of the Kshatriya (warrior) caste, gained their predominant position in Basehra because they were relatives of the Rajah of Manda, the Thakur prince who once ruled this area.

With the Thakur's control over the land go other kinds of dominance. Like all Indian villages, Basehra is nominally governed by a 13-man elected village council. Because of their numerical strength, the lower and middle castes control the council, which is headed by Bishwanath Prasad, a gray-bearded Kushwaha. In practice, however, the council has little power here, apparently because the upper castes simply will not accept the rule of the lower castes. The real authority, therefore, seems to lie with an informal seven-man council made up of three Thakurs (Alam Singh, the village's oldest man; Brij Bhan

Singh, Dhan Bahadur's brother, and Bhagwati Singh), two Kaisthyas, one Ahir and one Kushwaha.

The Thakurs and other landholders employ the lower-caste landless laborers, chiefly the Kols, to till their fields—usually for about two and a half pounds of grain a day.

Some of the Kol families have relationships with Thakur families going back three, four or more generations. Budhu, a 60-year-old man blind in one eye, is the leader of Basehra's Kols. "We've always worked for Alam Singh and his family," says Budhu. "My grandfather worked for them, my father worked for them, my son is working for them now, and I guess his children will, too."

The relationship is a deep and many-faceted one, extending far beyond mere agricultural labor. Budhu's family, including the women, perform all sorts of tasks for Alam Singh—cleaning the yard and house, making the cow-dung cakes used for fuel, building the thorn hedges used to keep the cows out of the fields.

Those Kol families, like Budhu's, which have long-term relationships with Thakurs are relatively well off. Such Thakurs feel a sense of responsibility for "our Kols," as they describe them. Even when there is no real work to be done, they try to find something the Kols can do around the house to earn a little grain. When that is impossible, they may advance them a little grain to be deducted from their wages in a good year.

A healthy villager can earn about three rupees a day breaking rock, but Bhaggu, Sumer and Mudair—teamed with two other cripples from a neighboring village—made only 20 rupees all together for a

recent week's work. Two of them dug out the stones while the other three, their crutches laid beside their bent legs, cracked the stones with small hammers.

About 60 men and women from Basehra have been working at breaking rocks in the "forest" this summer. The work is irregular. Sometimes the supervisors come with their trucks and sometimes they do not.

But for many landless villagers it is the only work available since the relief project closed. This project—construction of a water storage pool—began in March and provided work for hundreds of men and women at 12 cents a day, but it was halted with the first rains in June.

Up the road, seven miles on the other side of Basehra, is Koraon, headquarters of the "block development officer" who is responsible for all development activities in the block's 193 villages. The walls of his office are covered with pictures of Gandhi and Nehru and posters illustrating the pest-control and family-planning programs.

B. N. Misra, the block development officer, recounts patiently what his staff has done for Basehra in this year of scarcity. Loans of 1,000 and 1,200 rupees were made to two villagers to dig irrigation wells, and five other villagers got loans to build or repair drinking-water wells. Other villages have dug more wells than Basehra has, the officer says, but Basehra's soil is very rocky. "In most parts of the village you hit bed rock a few feet down and you have to blast. That's very expensive."

Basehra has benefited from the Kapuri Service Society, a cooperative set up with the aid of the block office to provide seeds, farm implements, pesticides and fertilizers on credit. Seventy-one of Basehra's farm-

ers are members of the society, which also serves four other villages. A farmer can get a loan from the society up to eight times the share capital he has in the society. The loan must be paid back at the end of the crop with 8½ per cent interest. If the loan is not paid back, no new loan can be obtained. Block officials say this regulation has been relaxed to allow Basehra's farmers, who could not possibly pay back last year's loans, to borrow for the coming crop. However, the farmers say they have been refused new loans.

Therefore, many villagers fall back on more traditional ways of raising money. They borrow from money-lenders in Sirsa, a nearby market place. Interest rates vary by caste. This year, villagers hard up for cash also sold jewelry, cows and even land.

The canal water which runs through but not onto Basehra's land has been galling the village's farmers this year. As one says, "It is a horrible thing to see all that water there and your fields scorching in the sun."

In earlier years, the villagers cared less. Since the canal was opened in 1958, the three-mile stretch through Basehra had never irrigated more than 21 of the village's 1,000 acres of cultivated land. In years when the rains were good, no canal water was used. Since farmers must pay 11 rupees per acre per crop for the water, they saw no reason to pay when they had rain. This year every farmer with land below the canal used the water, and 127 acres were watered. But most of the villagers, whose land is above the canal, got nothing.

The failure of either the villagers or the block officials to find some way of getting the water out of the canal and onto the

fields puzzles the visitor. At one place, where the canal passes through Dhan Bahadur's land, a pipe can be seen hovering just three inches above the water. "Why don't you lower the pipe?" Dhan Bahadur is asked. "The block won't let us," he replies. "Of course we'll let him," says the block. "It costs too much money," says Dhan Bahadur. "It doesn't cost anything at all," says the block. "It's too much work; we haven't got that much energy these days," says Dhan Bahadur.

It's the same story when the visitor asks why diesel pumps or bullock-driven "Persian wheels" aren't used to raise the water as they are in other areas. "We've asked for them but the Government don't give them to us," say the villagers. "We don't give them out. The villagers have to get them themselves," says the Irrigation Department. "A Persian wheel costs too much, and what's more, it wouldn't work here," say the villagers. "Of course it would work and it could be built very cheaply," says the Irrigation Department. Why don't you go out and show the villagers how to do it, the department is asked? "That's not our job; it's the block development office's job," says the Irrigation Department. "We're too busy," says the block development office.

So it was no surprise when seven men crept out one night last October with shovels and staves and broke through the dikes of the canal in nine places. The water, under heavy pressure from up the canal, seeped across the land. The culprits were apprehended but never charged because, as the tahsildar said, "We wanted to take a lenient view. The villagers were in distress and we didn't want to drag them into a court of law."

Basehra takes its religion seriously. The village boasts four tiny white-domed temples—three devoted to the worship of Shiva, the god of destruction, and one to Hanuman, the monkey god. All of the temples are served by one Brahman priest.

At this time of year farmers perform the traditional *havan* ceremony to implore the gods for rain. Early one recent evening 12 farmers and their families gathered around a small fire to begin their all-night *havan* vigil and prayers. Led by the Brahman priest with a trident smeared in red and white powder on his forehead, they chanted, "hail Ram, hail Shiva," as they poured clarified butter and roasted gram onto the fire. Clouds of incense rose from brass pots as the priest blew four blasts on his conch horn and the other villagers turned their eyes upward into the star-speckled sky.

The next morning the stars gave way to sun again, but nobody was particularly disturbed. "We will produce what God gives us," said Bishwanath Prasad. This refrain is heard over and over again in Basehra, usually accompanied by a shrug of the shoulders. Religious fatalism prevails all over India, but those who know Basehra well believe it is particularly strong there.

"Basehra is a poor village because it just doesn't care," says Kamta Prasad Singh, chairman of the development block's elected council. A vigorous, articulate man who does care, Singh says Basehra's villagers are "royal," a word used in this part of the country to describe a man with a "don't give a damn" attitude. "We have other villages around here which might be just as poor as Basehra, but they try to develop. Basehra doesn't try. The block

dug compost pits all over the village, but the people never put compost in them. They just fill up with mud.”

A few villagers have managed to shake off Basehra's pervasive lethargy. At 30, Sudhir Chand Srivastava is a lecturer in botany at Allahabad University. Kedar Nath Srivastava is a parcel clerk at Allahabad's railway station. They speak with affection but sadness about their ancestral home.

“Certainly ours is a backward village,” says Kedar Nath as he sits in the station's new canteen. “Only 20 per cent of the villagers are literate. Family planning has

not reached the village yet. Most of the farmers don't use chemical fertilizers. But it really isn't their fault. A child doesn't know how to walk at birth. Adults must help him. Basehra needs help.”

Two other Srivastavas from the village are studying in Allahabad today—one at the Law College and one at the Agricultural College—the only villagers now at the university level. Both agree that Basehra needs help, but neither wants to go back. “I'll have a Master of Science degree in agriculture soon,” says Suraj Prasad Srivastava. “What would I do in Basehra?”



Machinery is rarely seen on construction sites in India. These stone breakers work on a government road building project in the village of Basehra.

The Tragedy of Waste

Aside from problems of climate, resistance to change and apparent lethargy, waste is a major cause of food shortages. It is ironic that the proportion of food lost through waste is much higher in the less-developed countries than in the more-developed ones. The following reading briefly reviews this unfortunate problem.

The problem of waste is one of the hungry world's most vicious ailments. Waste, largely caused by pests, now robs hundreds of millions of at least a fifth of the food they might be eating. In some areas the loss is put even higher—as much as 50 percent.

The lower figure alone is all too easy to put into human terms. It means that where there might have been enough food for five children to eat properly one, owing to waste, will starve. Or if the available food is divided equally, all will be malnourished. But of course the picture is much worse than this. For food losses are greatest in regions where there is already heavy undernourishment. The grain consumed by rats, birds and insects, the great quantities ruined by mold, the fresh fruit and vegetables damaged on their slow way through the hands of too many middlemen or in transit on inadequate vehicles on bad roads in tropical climates, all add

more poverty to the already poor, and more misery to those least able to bear it.

In a paper on grain wastage presented to the Eighth FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Far East, the chairman of India's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research was quoted as stating that more than 50 percent of food in that country is being lost from all causes; this he expressed in financial terms as being equal to about twice the national budget. The same paper, referring to surveys made by the Central Food Technological Research Institute at Mysore, India, reports estimates of postharvest losses exceeding 25 percent.

Even in a country like the United States, with sophisticated ways of protecting what it grows, grain destruction by rats is of the order of 5,300,000 tons annually. However, this is only about 3 percent of the national production. If the world in general could get the overall figure for

† Stanley Baron, "The Tragedy of Waste," *Freedom from Hunger* (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, March-April, 1967).

waste down to a not unreasonable 10 percent, there is no question but that millions now hungry could be fed. But this means, above all, a formidable battle against ignorance, poverty and fatalism.

At present, waste all too often begins on the farm and traces a circle back to the farm.

Seed damaged in storage germinates poorly, so the subsistence farmer must often sow double the quantity necessary. When his crops wilt because of pests or diseases, the symptoms which should have warned him are unrecognized. Diseased and damaged crops cross-infect others during storage, so their value is lowered. This is reflected in the quality of the food he eats and in the cash he gets from the surplus.

In Asia a great deal of rice is lost simply because it is not worth the growers' while to dry it properly. Much of it will be handed over in lieu of debt to a middleman or to the landlord under a sharecropping system. Often (in Malaysia and East Pakistan, for example) there is little attempt to dry it at all, and the way is wide open for attacks by insects and micro-organisms.

Depredations of this kind in India have been reckoned as approaching 3 million tons a year and there is no reason to imagine they are proportionately less elsewhere in the tropics or semitropics, where more than 2,000 million people must try to live on the products of their own lands.

Weight loss (the most obvious kind) can occur after harvest for many reasons other than those already mentioned. Birds peck holes in the bags on the way to the market and grain trickles—or pours out. The loss can amount to 70 percent of a bag. Rodents

chew holes in the bags and mix their excreta in the spillage. Bags which burst for other reasons, including sheer old age, regularly account for a loss of a couple of pounds in every hundredweight in some areas.

Dust and dirt, anywhere, encourage insect infestations, but in the humid tropics the effect is worse because the moisture absorbed helps to heat up the grain, providing ideal breeding conditions. In these hot damp climates the breeding cycle for grain and bean weevils is from three to four weeks. In a couple of months a single pair of weevils will multiply itself tenfold, and within three months the waste in infested maize, caused by their progeny, has been found to be 16 percent.

This, moreover, is only a waste of *weight*. Because it would often be impossible (even if anyone tried) to remove the dead insects and excreta, there is also waste in the form of contamination, which may be at least as large as the actual damage done. Contamination means, in turn, that the quality of the foods is reduced. Another cause of food quality loss is the liking shown by many pests for just those elements most nourishing to man. Beetles and moths, wreaking damage within the endosperm of maize, for example, rob the grain of its protein and vitamins and add to the world's malnutrition.

Here again, the waste has to be measured not only by sheer weight of the food these pests destroy, which is colossal, but by contamination and loss of quality, both leading to poorer prices for the farmer and an acceleration of the vicious downward spiral into poverty breeding more poverty, and waste more waste.

In many parts of Africa and on a wide

scale in Southeast Asia, parts of Southwest Asia and the South Pacific, rats attack the harvest, often with devastating results, before it has been gathered in. But their greatest havoc is wrought in the warehouses. A report on grain losses in India estimates that rodents account for 10,300,000 tons, an excessively high proportion of this being in private merchants' stores, although these are actually of less capacity than the government-controlled storage depots in which the loss incidentally is far less.

"The dirt floors of grain storage warehouses in many developing countries," another report states, "are a continuous maze of rodent burrows, with ecological conditions nearly ideal for rodent reproduction. . . . In these circumstances losses of a third of the stored grain in a few months are common."

Measures as simple as introducing concrete floors, putting ground glass plaster on the walls and metal strips under the doors of storage warehouses, combined with a thoroughgoing use of rodenticides, would go a long way toward keeping this particular enemy at bay; but legislation would almost certainly be necessary to enforce such action in most countries and this brings up the problem all developing countries face: the cost. Technical advice and instruction in pest control are already available but need to be greatly extended; and there is a great need for commercial pest control companies able to deploy the expertise gained in tackling this problem elsewhere.

To get results on the farm calls for a many-pronged attack beginning as soon as the harvest is gathered. Methods of drying rice paddy, evolved over the centuries,

include laying it out on the open ground, hanging it on racks or stacking it. Threshing may be done with a flail or by treading, in which the crop is spread on a level floor and animals driven over it. These add their own impurities and neither method is in any case efficient. A second drying, usually on a floor exposed to the sun, is required, and after this comes the milling. In vast areas of Africa, the Near East and the Far East, this is simply a matter of hand-pounding with mortar and pestle, an archaic method interesting to watch but highly wasteful because of the repeated winnowing necessary. There are also many small mills in which the miller takes part-payment in bran and small broken grain. Like the mills of God, the rural miller grinds slowly and exceedingly small, so that here again is a serious source of waste.

People change slowly. Traditional attitudes and religious taboos against the taking of life, even of rats, for example, are deeply embedded over large areas of the world.

The problem of waste, like so many others in the hungry world, is one of information and example. The task is long-term but not impossible. It needs to be tackled urgently but carried out with patience and understanding.

If the losses in the world's cereal grain could be cut by only half, the total protein saving alone would be 9 million tons—enough to fulfill the bodily needs of 280 million people for a year.

That is the measure of the challenge.

Implications of Asian Population Growth

Any inquiry into the causes of food shortages or poverty in Asia should include a consideration of the impact of an expanding population. The following statistically-oriented article raises important questions about what some people consider to be not only Asia's but the world's most pressing problem.

Thomas Robert Malthus at the beginning of the 19th century claimed that the world population was increasing at a geometric rate: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, etc., while food supplies were increasing at an arithmetic rate: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. He felt that these mathematical progressions clearly pointed to future food shortages, and that serious famines, epidemics, conflicts, and wars might be necessary to help check population increases. The Malthusian essay was greeted with mixed reactions, and ever since its publication has been criticized by a wide variety of people including communist philosophers and Christian theologians. This rather rejected theory, however, has recently experienced increasing attention because of its general focus on what many consider to be a potentially dangerous world problem.

It has been estimated that the world population in 8,000 B.C. was 10 million people. This number grew to 250 million

by the birth of Christ, to 500 million by 1600, to 1.5 billion by 1900, and finally to today's 3.5 billion. Generally speaking, the world population has recently been doubling every 35 years. Last year alone there was an increase of 75 million people with the birth of 125 million and the accompanying death of 50 million. The present annual 2 per cent rate of population increase if continued would not only result in the world having 7 billion people, double today's figure, by the year 2000, but would in six and a half centuries result in each person having only one square foot of earth upon which to live. If the 2 per cent rate of increase continued for 1500 years, the world's people would weigh as much as the earth itself. Such statistical projections obviously are not predictions, but it is worth noting that during the sixty seconds it may have taken to read this far in the article, there have been 225 births and 93 deaths throughout the world.

[†] Robin J. McKeown, *Implications of Asian Population Growth*, Bulletin 68a, Asian Studies Curriculum Project (Berkeley: University of California, 1968).

The fact that 190,000 more people appear each day who must be fed becomes even more impressive when it is realized that at least 10,000 people die each day from primary malnutrition or from the consequences of secondary malnutrition. It has also been estimated that out of every 20 children born in underdeveloped countries, 10 are going to die from causes arising directly or indirectly from hunger, and for the same reasons 7 others will suffer physical or mental retardation. From a lack of Vitamin A, nearly 80,000 children under the age of four will go blind next year, and half of these children eventually will die. A further disturbing fact is that about 70 per cent of all people live in the less-developed countries, but that by the year 2000 it is likely that this figure will increase to 80 per cent. In a generation from now, five times as many people will be born in the less-developed countries than in the more-developed countries.

India, in spite of a high birth rate, has drastically reduced its death rate from 43 per 1,000 people in 1901 to an estimated 18 per 1,000 in 1970 and has changed the life expectancy of its people from 23 years of age in 1931 to an estimated 49 years in 1970. India which now has 500 million people, equal to the 55 states of Africa and Latin America, will very likely double its population by the year 2000 within an area two-fifths the size of continental United States. China which now has less arable land available for farming than the United States and which is also experiencing a reduction in death rates will possibly double its present population by the turn of the century. Prospects for Asia are not particularly encouraging in spite of in-

creased food production as the Asian countries during the last five years have experienced a 4 per cent decline in the amount of food available for each person.

What is going to be the impact of the population increases on the Chinese farmer and his way of life? What will be the impact of a doubled population on a country like India which needs 2.5 million tons of grain increase each year just to maintain the present level of nutrition and which must double its food production before all Indians could even have a nutritionally adequate diet? What will be the various effects of the population increase on the immediate progress of Asian industries, on the stability of Asian governments, and on future world security?

Note. Major source of data: Philip M. Hauser, "World Population Problems," *Headline Series No. 174* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, Dec. 1965).



Conclusions

1. What are the causes of hunger and poverty in Asia?
2. What are the effects of hunger and poverty on Asian people and Asia itself?
3. How might hunger and poverty in Asia affect the future of the world?
4. Can anything be done about economic conditions in Asia? If so, what are possible solutions?
5. Compare Eastern and Western standards for poverty conditions.

Suggested Readings

Beals, Alan R. *Gopalpur, A South Indian Village*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1962. This well-written booklet is a report on the patterns of living in a specific Indian village. The analysis is somewhat technical but generally clear and readable.

Hauser, Philip M. *World Population Problems*, Headline Series, No. 174, New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1965. This booklet is a survey of world population growth that includes the implications of the immediate and future impacts of population on food supply and living standards.

Hopcraft, Arthur. *Born to Hunger*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968. This book is a report of a British journalist who traveled throughout the world to see first-hand the problems of hunger. While only a portion of the book considers Asia, there is a valuable chapter on India.

Johnson, Gale D. *The Struggle Against World Hunger*, Headline Series, No. 184, New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1967. This survey provides an impressive collection of data related to world problems associated with hunger and food production.

Myrdal, Jan. *Report from a Chinese Village*, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1965. This book was made up primarily of excerpts from tape-recorded interviews with the residents of a Communist Chinese village. Myrdal provides no illustrations of hunger, but the living conditions he portrays may indicate poverty according to some standards. Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* might prove to be a good fictional companion to Myrdal's work by describing examples of hunger and poverty in traditional China.

Nair, Kusum. *Blossoms in the Dust*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1963. This extremely informative and perceptive book about India was written by an Indian woman. Capably and often colorfully, she describes the realities of Indian life.

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